DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 784 PS 015 323

AUTHOR Ochiltree, Gay; Amato, Paul
TITLE The Child's Eye View of Family Life: A Report to Respondents in a Study Conducted in Victoria in Late 1982 and Early 1983.
INSTITUTION Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne (Australia).
REPORT NO ISBN-0-642-07479-8
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 85p.
AVAILABLE FROM Institute of Family Studies, 766 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, 3000, Australia ($10.00 in Australian funds).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Childhood Attitudes; *Children; Family (Sociological Unit); Family Environment; *Family Life; *Family Problems; Family Relationship; Fathers; Friendship; Mothers; Nuclear Family; One Parent Family; *Parent Child Relationship; Stepfamily
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Victoria)

ABSTRACT

Marriage and the family traditionally have been structured around the key functions of the nurturing and socialization of children. This report looks closely at how effectively and competently various family types manage these tasks. Containing a brief overview of the "Australian Children in Families Study," this report concentrates on the child's view of family life, on how he or she uses the family as a resource and a base from which to control the environment. Past research on children and their families has frequently been more concerned with parents' views than with the views of children, who were seen as too difficult to talk with, too immature, and too easily upset to make worthwhile contributions to knowledge in this area. This report bypasses these research limitations through development of interview testing questions that use the "children's language" rather than adult researchers' terminology. The report highlights the importance of both parents to every child's well-being. Following a detailed explanation of the research methodology and a summary of the main findings, actual narratives from children and compilations of findings in each of the following areas are described: how children see their parents, how children feel when their parents separate or divorce, how children feel about "access" parents (separated or divorced parents who have visiting arrangements), children's relationships within the family, family changes, how families are organized, family conflict and family cohesion, children's friendships, juvenile delinquency, children's outside interests, children's views on school, television viewing habits, and job expectations. (DST)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

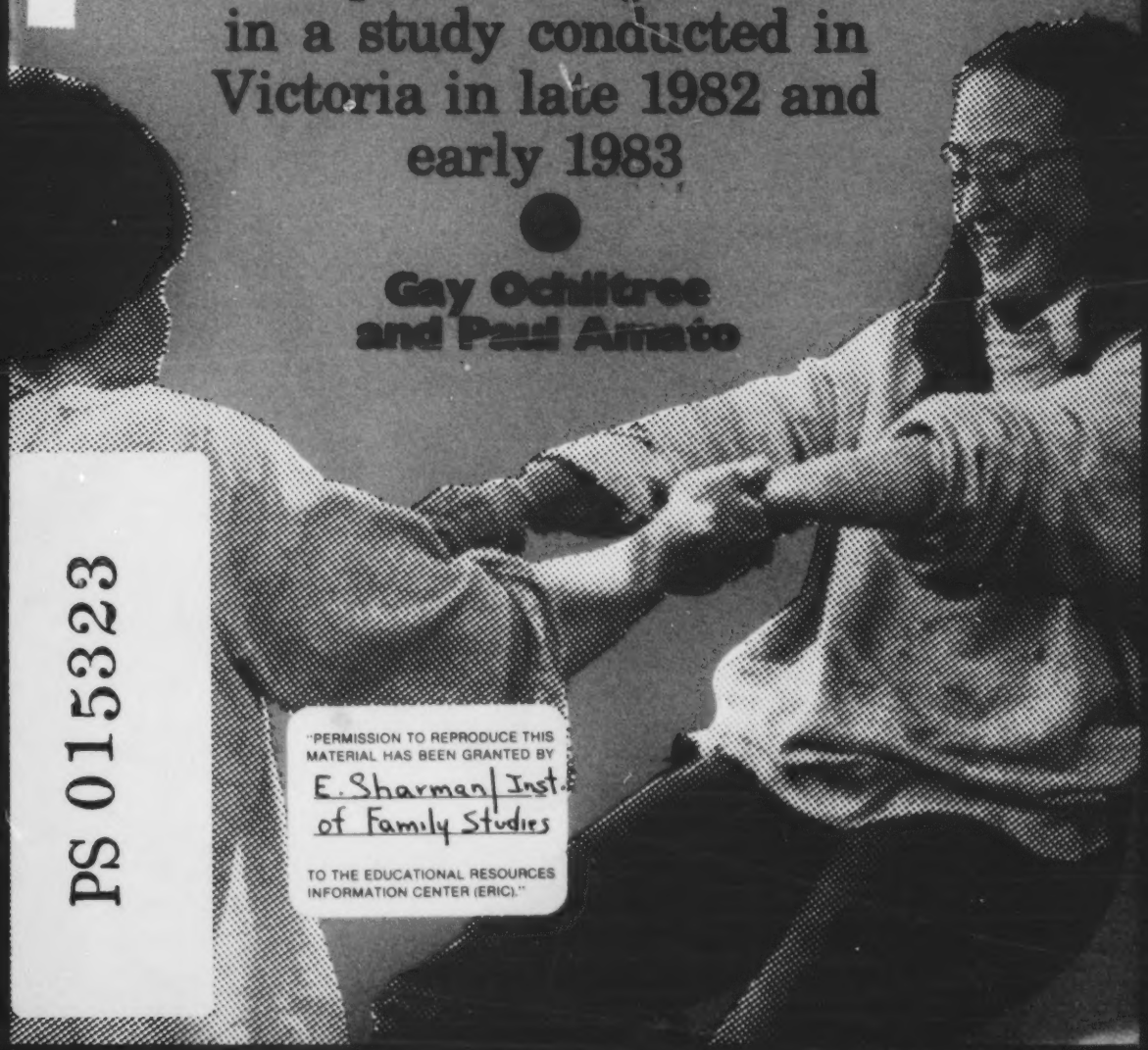
[ ] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

The Child's Eye View of Family Life

A report to respondents in a study conducted in Victoria in late 1982 and early 1983

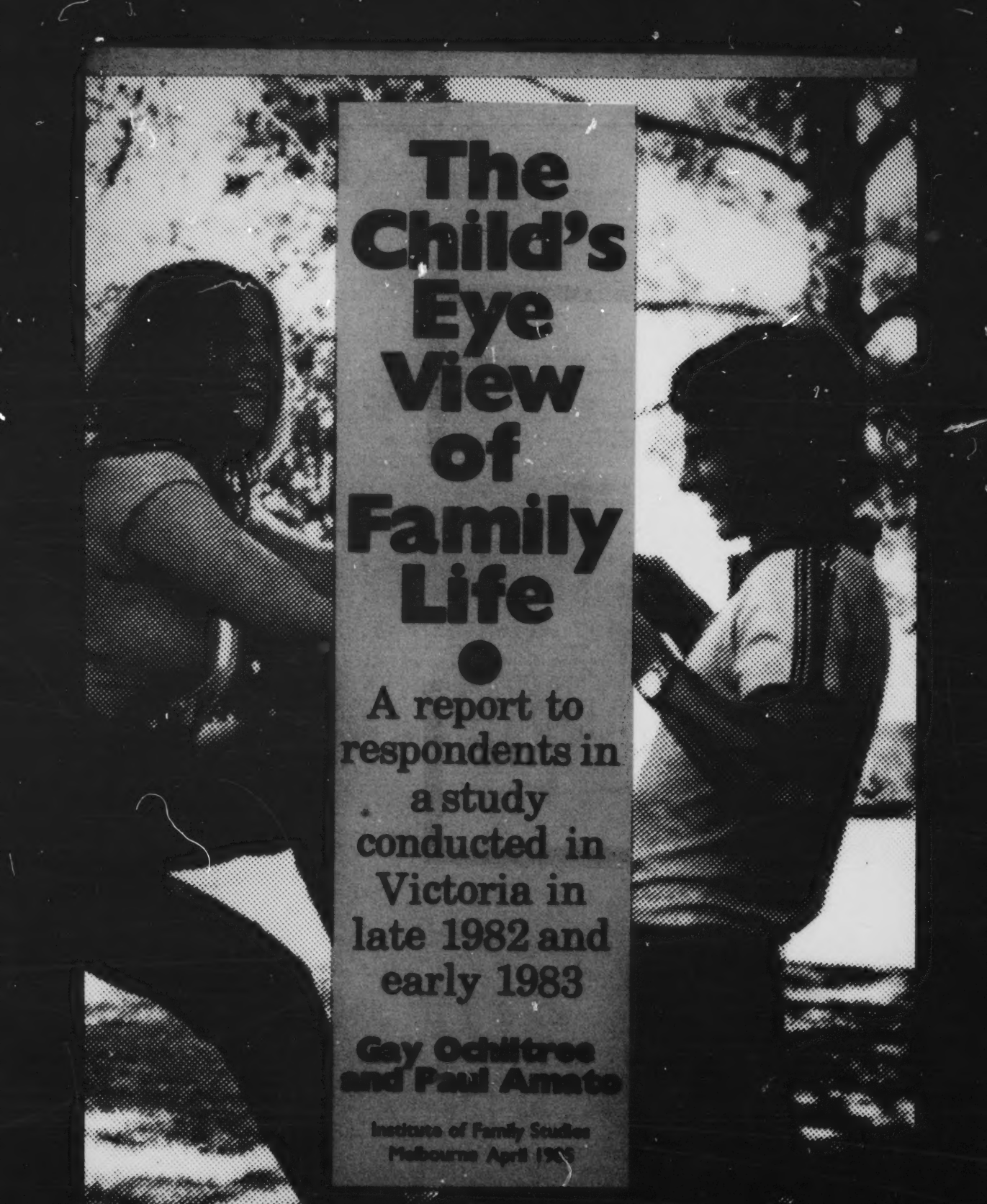
Gay Ochiltree
and Paul Amato



ED261784

PS 015323

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. Sharman/Inst. of Family Studies
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



The Child's Eye View of Family Life

A report to respondents in a study conducted in Victoria in late 1982 and early 1983

Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato

Institute of Family Studies
Melbourne April 1985

© Institute of Family Studies
— Commonwealth of Australia 1985

Institute of Family Studies
766 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne 3000 Australia
Telephone (03) 342 9100

April 1985

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

Ochiltree, Gay.
The child's eye view of family life: a report to respondents in a study conducted in Victoria in late 1982 and early 1983.

Bibliography.
ISBN 0 642 07479 8.

1. Family — Victoria — Melbourne. 2. Parent and child — Victoria — Melbourne. 3. Children — Victoria — Melbourne — Attitudes. I. Amato, Paul R. II. Australia, Institute of Family Studies. III. Title.

306.8'5

Typeset by Meredith Trade Lino Pty Ltd
Printed by Impact Printing (Vic.) Pty Ltd
Designed by Mark Carter
Photographs by Don Whyte
and Howard Birnstihl

Forew

This is a delightful study and I am sure it will generate a great deal of interest. We decided when the Institute began that the views and experiences of children had to be given equal importance to those of adults, particularly as few overseas or Australian studies had ever looked at the child's view of family life.

In its planning for research, the Institute outlined a study on children in families as follows:

Since marriage and the family traditionally have been structured round the key functions of nurturing and socialising children, the Institute must look closely at how effectively various family types manage these tasks.

The intention of this project, however, is to concentrate on the child's *view of family life, on how he or she* uses *the family as a resource, as a base from which to control the environment. The theme of competence is central. Different families offer varied environments in which to grow as independent, coping human beings. Health, finances, emotional support, cultural values, decision-making processes, educational support, all contribute to the sorts of adults/parents today's children will become.*

Clearly the institute would have to look at children in different types of families and at various life stages. Sub-studies could be devised to fit together a comprehensive picture of the family as used by the child.

ord

It is not, however, easy to interview children in a non-threatening way or to elicit honest answers about what is a very private and to some extent taken-for-granted part of their lives. Gay Ochiltree, the Research Fellow in charge of designing this study, spent many hours developing and testing questions that used the 'children's language' rather than adult researchers' terminology. It is a tribute to her sensitivity and long experience as an educator that the interview schedule became such a workable stimulus for children to give their own views willingly and openly.

A long and careful process of 'permission' had to be negotiated. The Institute is very careful to maintain high ethical standards in its research and to guarantee confidentiality for respondents. We worked from the education 'systems' first, informed teachers' unions and parents' associations, obtained permission from individual school councils before approaching parents. Then letters describing the study and its aims went to every parent, asking their agreement to interviewing separately the child and at least one parent. We are most appreciative of the parents who agreed to take part, overwhelmingly the majority of those who were asked.

Gay was helped in all of this by Sue Girling-Butcher and Pam Larritt, Institute Research Assistants, who visited schools, parents' groups and even individual parents to explain and make arrangements; they conducted most of the initial 'screening' test on the classes chosen randomly from the sample schools. Dr Malcolm Rosier of the Australian Council of Educational Research was a valued consultant on the sampling design and Mr Irving Saulwick of Saulwick, Weller and Associates acted as external management consultant to the study. To them we are most grateful. Paul Amato joined our staff in 1983 and has played a major role in setting up the data for analysis and in carrying out that analysis. The team work has been exemplary and I am sure the results will speak for themselves.

This is a report written for the parents and older children, for the teachers, and for all other parents who wish to understand their own children better. This *Australian Children in Families Study* looks at 'ordinary' children from a wide range of 'ordinary' families including intact, step and one-parent family types. Their story has not been told adequately before.

The Institute will issue more formal reports on aspects of the data as further analyses are done. We will also be releasing reports based on two related studies of children commissioned externally by the Institutue. One is of adolescents and the effects of divorce, the other is of young children and the effects of divorce: both provide information about which aspects of divorce do upset children's well-being.

Nothing is so important as the well-being of children, yet there are signs that modern society may once again be neglecting them, pushing their needs aside in the pursuit of adult self-interest. This study shows how caring most parents are and how much children themselves care for their parents. As a result, it is a heartening counter to the more pessimistic views expressed in such books as Neil Postman's *The disappearance of childhood*. Of course, the study also identifies several areas of concern, areas in need of policy action and improved parental awareness.

In particular, the study highlights the importance of both parents to every child's well-being. Even when adults divorce, the child's 'family' remains and they need the love and support of *both* parents. There are significant lessons to be learned here about the responsibility every parent carries for both providing and for nurturing and about the social supports that are needed if these responsibilities are to be fulfilled.

Don Edgar
Director
Institute of Family Studies

Acknowledgements

The Australian Institute of Family Studies would like to thank all those who made this study possible. For their help and cooperation we are indebted to the Education Department of Victoria, the Catholic Education Office, and the Association of Independent Schools. We also thank the principals and staff members of schools who allowed us to select from and interview their pupils. But it is to the parents and children who agreed to take part in the study that we are most grateful. They gave us not only their time but also their personal experiences. It is on their experiences that this report is based.

Foreword

Introduction

2

Summary of main findings

4

Children in families
- The Study

6

How children see their parents

10

Contents

How children feel when their parents separate or divorce

24

How children feel about access parents

30

Children's relationships within the family

36

Family changes

40

How families are organised

44

Family conflict and family cohesion

50

Children's friendships

58

Teenagers and trouble with the law

62

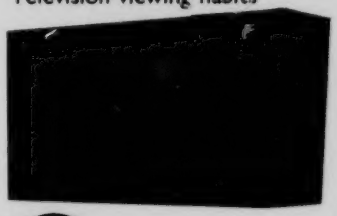
Children's outside interests

64

Children's views on school

66

Television viewing habits



70

Children's job expectations

71

Conclusion

72

List of References

74

Introduction

AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES HAVE changed in many ways from the families of our grandparents. Children of today not only live in a more complex technological society, but they also grow up in rather different family circumstances. The changes in families include: a falling birth rate, from an average of seven children in a family late last century to about three per family with children in the 1960s and 1970s when children in this study were born; an increase in the number of married women in the paid labour force, from 13 per cent in 1954 to 43 per cent of married women with children in 1982; and the most controversial change of all, the increasing rate of marriage breakdown and consequent increase in the number of one-parent families, from 6.7 per cent of families with children in 1966 to 12.7 per cent in 1981. Marital breakdown increased during the 1970s, resulting in a decline in the number of 'traditional' families of two parents with children, from 93.3 per cent of all families with children in 1966 to 84.6 per cent in 1982 (Institute of Family Studies, 1983 a, b and c).

Since World War II, the Australian family has become more diverse in composition, lifestyle and ethnic background. For example, in 1947 only 9.8 per cent of Australians were born overseas and, of those, only 3 per cent were of non-British background; by the time of the 1976 Census, 20 per cent of the population was born overseas, and the proportion of Australians with migrant family backgrounds increases to 39 per cent if those with overseas-born parents are included (Storer, 1981). Thus, children today are growing up with a greater variety of values, life situations, and family circumstances than ever before.

Children in the smaller families of today do not have the multiple influences of brothers and sisters which were common earlier this century. They do not have to share or wait their turn to the same extent as do children in larger families. Many children grow up with a sibling of the same sex (or none at all) and do not have the experience of everyday intimacy and understanding of the opposite sex. Children in small families are usually closer in age and do not have the same opportunities to care for younger children or be cared for by older children, an experience which is common in bigger families; when children in the smaller contemporary family grow up, the birth of their own children may be the first close contact they have ever had with young babies. However, children in these smaller families may have opportunities unavailable to their parents and grandparents, such as going on to higher education.

Increasing numbers of Australian children are experiencing the breakdown of their parents' marriage and the eventual separation or divorce of their parents. In 1954 there were 8235 children whose parents had divorced. By 1971 the number of children had increased to 18 451, and in 1976, the first year of the new *Family Law Act*, the number jumped to 73 645 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981). All told, between 1976 and 1983 there were 430 773 children under the age of 18 who experienced the divorce of their parents. This is approximately 9.5 per cent of the

1983 child population under 18 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983, 1984).

There is also a large but unknown number of couples who separate and who do not go through the legal procedure of divorce. In 1982 the estimated figure for Australian children living in one-parent households was 427 000. In almost one third of one-parent households (30.3 per cent) the parents are separated only (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982).

Some children remain in a one-parent family for the whole of their childhood but for many the one-parent family is only temporary as parents go on to remarry or to form de facto relationships. When this happens the child lives with a step-parent (or de facto step-parent) and sometimes step-siblings. Recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that in 14 per cent of two-parent families, at least one partner has been married before. Furthermore, in a little over one quarter of these remarried families (26.6 per cent) there are children present from previous marriages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982). It is estimated by the Institute of Family Studies that 40 per cent of Australian marriages will end in divorce. This estimate applies equally to first marriages and remarriages. Furthermore, 60 per cent of divorces involve dependent children (McDonald, 1983). In writing about the effects of separation and divorce on children in America, two researchers make a point which is also relevant to the situation here in Australia:

As a consequence of these increases in both the rates of marital disruption and the involvement of children in this experience, transition between *families of orientation is likely soon to become nearly as common as continuous socialisation in a single family . . . it is imperative that we discover more about the correlates of inter-marital and multiple-family experience, especially as they infringe upon the lives of children.* (Bumpass and Rindfuss, 1978:2).

The *Australian Children in Families Study*, conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, was designed specifically to look at children's views of family life in different types of families and to gain insights into children's feelings about changes which occur in families.

This report of the study is a simple description of family members and family life as seen through the eyes of the child. Although parents as well as children participated in the study (see Chapter 1), this report focuses on responses obtained from the *children*. A separate report, which is based on parent interviews and which looks at the experience of being a parent, will be published later by the Institute of Family Studies.

For parents, **The child's eye view of family life** provides an opportunity to see how other families are coping with children the same age as their own. Children will have the opportunity to find out more about how other children feel about their families. In the preliminary stages of this study, the Institute became very aware that children (particularly adolescents who often considered their own problems to be unique) know little about what goes on in other families, especially as regards family problems. Some children take their parents and their families so much for granted that they quite often said in response to very simple questions that they had never thought about it. Describing their parents was quite a difficult task for many children.

While this report can be read from cover to cover, it can also be read in snippets as a reference on any particular subject covered, for example, on separation and divorce, pocket money, the effects of moving house and so on.

The *Australian Children in Families Study* is designed to complement other research undertaken by the Institute of Family Studies into factors affecting the marital and family stability of Australian families. These other projects are concerned with the adult experience of marriage and forming families, and marriage breakdown and remarriage.

Summary of main

- **Parents:** children have a high opinion of their parents but are also aware of their weaknesses. Because they have seen them in a wider variety of roles and situations, children in one-parent families and stepfamilies frequently gave less stereotyped descriptions of their parents than did children in two-parent families. On the whole, mothers and fathers were seen in traditional roles.

- **Stepmothers:** most children liked their stepmothers but there were a few exceptions.

- **Stepfathers:** children were less inclined to be favourably disposed towards stepfathers. This was particularly so for the adolescents. They either liked their stepfathers or were emphatically critical of them.

- **Separation and divorce of parents:** although most children were upset at the time of their parents' separations, most had accepted their situations and had adjusted with the passage of time. However, almost a quarter of the children wished their parents would get back together again.

- **Access parents:** the majority of children continued to see the parent who no longer lived with them. Nevertheless, adolescent children sometimes found this difficult as they grew away from the parent or wanted to spend time doing other things.

- **Companionship/ communication/worries:** the family member children are likely to spend most time with is mother (42 per cent primary, 44 per cent secondary). Mother was also mentioned most frequently as the person in the family with whom children said they liked to have good talks, and the person most children at both levels (81 per cent primary, 61 per cent secondary) turned to with their worries.

- **Changes:** children experienced many changes in their families — moving house, the birth of siblings, the death of a family member (sometimes in the extended family), gaining a step-parent and/or step-siblings, or when an older sibling commenced working.

- **Helping round the house:** mother still did most of the work around the house although children helped. Most children had certain tasks which they were expected to do regularly.

- **Decisions on behaviour, house rules and discipline:** mothers rather than fathers made the day-to-day decisions about television watching, children's bedtimes, choice of clothes and whether the children could go out. Mother was also more likely to be the parent who punished the children for disobedience than was father.

- **Parents' relationship:** most children thought their parents got on quite well. However, a small number of children at both age levels thought their parents did not get on very well (5 per cent primary, 10 per cent secondary).

findings

- **Fear of separation:** forty-eight per cent of primary school children feared that their parents might separate compared with 32 per cent of adolescents.

- **Friends:** a large proportion of children at both age levels (41 per cent primary, 59 per cent secondary) had at some time had a friend that their mother did not like. Fewer children (31 per cent primary, 41 per cent secondary) have had a friend their father did not like. However, a surprisingly large number of children (61 per cent primary, 75 per cent secondary) continued to see their friends despite parental disapproval.

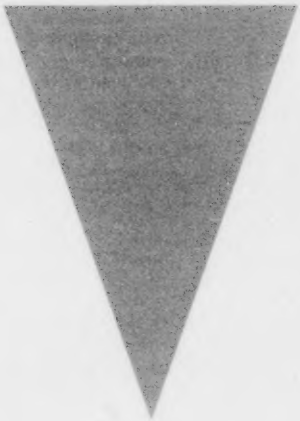
- **Pocket money:** most children received pocket money, with the exception of those adolescents who earned money through part-time jobs.

- **Smoking and drinking:** sixty-one per cent of adolescents in this sample said they never smoked, but only 29 per cent said they never drank alcohol.

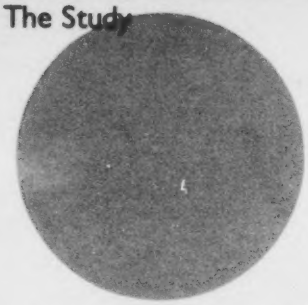
- **Unemployment:** sixty-one per cent of adolescents in this sample said they fear unemployment when they leave school.

Children in fami

lies • The Study



PAST RESEARCH ON CHILDREN and their families has frequently been more concerned with parents' views than with views of children who were seen as too difficult to talk with, too immature and easily upset to make worthwhile contributions to knowledge in this area. While parents understand a great deal about their children, they are unable to know exactly how their children experience family life.



Information on children and families often comes from professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors who work with children when there are difficulties, and in these circumstances, the child's viewpoint receives close attention. However, information gathered in counselling or therapy is related to problems experienced and is therefore more concerned with improving negative aspects of family life than with looking at the life situation of children in the broad spectrum of ordinary families.

In this study our aim is to redress this imbalance by concentrating on children's views of family life in the variety of ordinary Australian families. Such families range across the economic and educational spectrum, from the contented to the unhappy, and from the organised to the chaotic.

Because so little work had been done in this field, we were uncertain whether it would be feasible to interview children. However, studies in related fields indicated that it is possible to interview even quite young children about their understanding of personal experience. Leon Yarrow, in writing about research involving children, provided the most positive argument in favour of interviews:

The interview experience itself can be a gratifying one to children of all ages; their feelings of status are enhanced by receiving the full attention of an interested adult. After the child has been in the interview situation and has had the opportunity to air his thoughts and feelings to a permissive adult, the positive feelings developed may be sufficient to sustain the interview and motivate the child to respond to difficult questions requiring real effort (Yarrow, 1960: 568).

The child interview schedule (that is, the list of questions we asked children, and the wording of these questions) was painstakingly developed during the preliminary stages of the study. At first general group discussions were held with children about families. This stage was followed by individual interviews of greater depth, in which children were asked to assist with the wording of questions. The interviews were recorded and gradually the form of the interview schedule took shape. To enable the interview to run smoothly, care was taken to use the language of children rather than to use formal, grammatically correct language which was unnatural to them. The greatest difficulty was to word the questions in language suitable for both age groups (primary school children and secondary school children) chosen for this study.

When the interview schedule was in its final form, it was tried out again in several schools and modified where necessary. We discovered that it was best to continue to record the child's replies on cassette as this practice allowed the interviewer to give full attention to the child. These recorded interviews were transcribed by the interviewer into the interview schedule booklet as soon as possible after the interview, a method which allowed the exact words of each child to be captured.

The interviews

FOR EACH FAMILY STUDIED, one interview was conducted with the child and one interview was conducted with either the child's mother or father. Two interviews were needed, since the child's understanding and experience of family life is likely to be different in many ways from that of his or her parents. Talking to both parents *and* children allowed us to piece together a more complete picture of family life than would have been possible if we had only talked to parents *or* to children.

The interviews with children covered a number of different aspects of family life. These included the kinds of jobs the child did around the house, whether the child received an allowance (and if so, how much he or she received), the child's relationship with his or her mother and father, the kinds of activities the family engaged in together, the kinds of rules that existed in the family, and sources of conflict and tension among family members. Additional questions were asked of those children whose parents had separated or divorced, including questions dealing with their feelings at the time of separation. In addition to the questions about family life, we also asked children about their friends, the clubs or organisations they belonged to, and their school activities.

The interviews with parents also covered a range of topics, including their views of the child's personality and behaviour, their relationship with the child, their aspirations and expectations of the child, problems they have had in raising the child, their values regarding children, and their marital relationship. As in the children's interviews, additional questions were asked of parents who had divorced or separated, including how they thought the separation had affected their children.

Many of the questions we asked were open-ended, that is, children and parents were encouraged to respond to the questions in any way they liked, and all their comments were written down by our interviewers. We hoped that this would allow our respondents to tell their stories in their own words as much as possible.

The parents' interviews, on average, took about one and a quarter hours to complete. The children's interviews, on average,

took about one hour to complete. Of course, many of the interviews took considerably longer than this, depending on how much information people gave us about themselves. Although the interviews were long, and many of the questions were difficult, our respondents were generally highly cooperative in sharing their views with us.

As indicated in the Introduction, this report is concerned with how the *children* responded. A separate report of the study written from the parent interviews will be published later by the Institute of Family Studies.

How families were selected

ALL THE FAMILIES interviewed were selected through Victorian schools. The first step was to secure permission for the project from State and private school authorities. It was also important to obtain the cooperation of principal's associations, parent-teacher associations, and regional directors of education.

The next step involved selecting a sample representative of primary and secondary schools in Victoria. Altogether, 56 primary and 57 secondary schools were able to participate in the study. These schools were selected randomly, but in a manner which ensured that they represented, in the correct proportions, all State and private school systems in Victoria. The schools were located not only in Melbourne, but across the entire State.

To select the children for the study, one Year 3 or Year 4 class was selected from each primary school and one Year 10 or Year 11 class was selected from each secondary school. In each of these classes, a special effort was made to recruit students from one-parent families or step-parent families. This was because one of the main reasons for the study was to find out about the experiences of children growing up in a *variety* of family types. To ensure that we had enough children to make meaningful comparisons, we randomly selected children from each family type until the numbers were suitably balanced.

Letters were sent home with each child selected, explaining the reasons for the study and asking permission for the interview. Because we wanted both the child *and* one parent from each family, it was necessary to have the cooperation of *both* before interviews could be conducted. Overall, approximately 40 per cent of the families that we contacted were willing to participate in the study. As with any survey, some people were too busy, some people could not be bothered, and some people didn't want to talk about the subjects in which we were interested. However, members of 402 families did agree to be interviewed, a number which was sufficiently large to give us a great deal of valuable information.

Families in the sample

INTERVIEWS WERE completed with 195 primary school children and 207 secondary school children and one parent from each of these families. Both age groups were nearly evenly divided between boys and girls. Of all the children, 50 per cent lived with both natural parents, 31 per cent lived with one parent only (28 per cent with mothers and 3 per cent with fathers), 18 per cent lived in step-parent families, and a small group of 1 per cent lived with relatives other than parents.

About 61 per cent of the families were living in the Melbourne area, with 39 per cent living throughout the rest of the State. Most parent interviews were conducted with mothers (90 per cent, although fathers (7.5 per cent) and step-parents or other relatives (2.5 per cent) were occasionally interviewed instead.

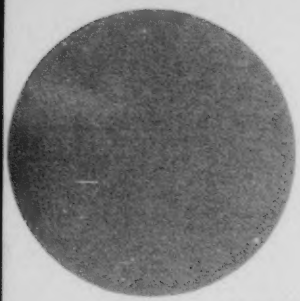
The occupations of family members covered the entire spectrum of occupational groups. Fathers were employed mainly as tradesmen (29 per cent), as professionals or technicians (20 per cent), or as administrators, executives, or managers (12 per cent). Approximately 5 per cent of fathers reported being unemployed at the time of the interview. Somewhat more than half the mothers (53 per cent) were employed outside the home. Mothers were employed in clerical positions (15 per cent), in professional or technical positions (12 per cent), and in service or recreational industries (11 per cent). Approximately 3 per cent of mothers reported being unemployed at the time of the interview.

Three quarters (75 per cent) of parents were Australian-born, with a further 11 per cent being born in the United Kingdom. Only relatively small numbers of parents born in Italy, Greece, the Middle East, or Asia were able to participate due to the greater difficulty involved in using English as a second language. Thus, some of the findings from the present study may not be relevant to migrant groups with different patterns of family relationships.

How children see

their parents

PARENTS HAVE CARE OF their children from birth and their influence on the growing child is profound. They have the responsibility of caring for the physical health of their children, teaching them how to behave, providing a suitable home environment, preparing them for school and supporting them while they are at school. Most parents take their responsibilities seriously.



However, it must be remembered that the child is not a passive creature who develops entirely in response to parental guidance. From birth, the differing temperaments of babies influence their parents, establishing between them a unique two-way relationship which continues to develop as the child grows and matures (Hartup, 1978; Bell, 1979; Hess, 1981). The parent has greater power, knowledge and control of the environment, and without doubt helps shape the personality, world view and life chances of the child; but in return the child can be compliant or non-compliant, aggressive or malleable, loving or hating and all shades of feeling in between (Collins, 1975). Parents influence children, but do not totally control them — the child's own developing personality and mental and physical qualities stimulate responses from the parent, as well.

It is known from a number of sources that parents throughout the Western world are anxious about their role as parents. Feelings of responsibility have got out of hand for many and they worry that, despite all their efforts, they may have done the wrong thing by their children. The feeling of guilt is one manifestation of parental anxiety: some parents feel that if their children fail at something, or are not successful, that they as parents are responsible. Other parents whose children are doing well and have no particular problems sometimes fear that something may happen to their children in the future unless they protect them from all stress (Skolnick, 1978; Pugh, 1983).

Parents in past centuries have not suffered this pervasive anxiety about their role and, because many children did not survive childhood illness, were more concerned with matters of life and death. The great emphasis this century on the importance of early experience for the future character of the child has made parents more self-conscious about child rearing. This changed emphasis arose partly from the scientific theories of human development which emerged early this century (for example, the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, or the conditioned learning theories of J.B. Watson and B.F. Skinner). Such theories placed great responsibility for the child's future behaviour and development on the influence of the mother in the early years. Based on the modern faith that science inevitably leads to progress, these theories of child rearing and human development were transformed and incorporated into the popular child rearing manuals which have had a profound influence on the upbringing of children in the last 40 or 50 years. The methods of child rearing developed from different theories were often contradictory, and became fashionable in certain circles and at certain periods. Thus, at one time it was advocated that children should follow a rigid routine and should not be allowed to have their own way, and at others it was advocated that children should not be inhibited or restricted (Ochiltree and Edgar, 1980).

Parents do not have to read child rearing manuals to become aware of some of these ideas for they have become part of the general public thinking about child development and are often aired in the popular media. As a result, some parents fear that if the child suffers some emotional trauma in childhood he or she may be damaged for life. It is often the most caring parents who worry the most. Being a parent is a responsibility, but anxiety and uncertainty make it more difficult. It is the mother who is under the greatest pressure in this regard because mother is seen as being more closely linked with children than is father. This stress on mother's role did not always exist. Before the Industrial Revolution when work was centred in the home it was easier for all the family, including father, to be involved in child care without any special effort. At the same time mothers were engaged in work just as fathers were. Home and work became separated with the Industrial Revolution, and the middle-class wife was increasingly isolated in the home, caring for her children. As mentioned earlier, the theories of Freud and others gave added and 'scientific' emphasis to the importance of the mother's role. Later, John Bowlby's work on maternal deprivation, which was concerned with the child who lived in a hospital or residential institution and separated from his or her entire family, was misapplied to the situation of the child living in his or her own home. Bowlby's findings were used to emphasise the importance of the mother-child relationship without reference to the father or other family members (Brennan, 1983).

This emphasis on the role of the mother and mother-child bonding has led to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, mothers are frequently seen as over-intrusive in the lives of their children by members of the mental health profession while on the other hand, until very recently, the child-rearing literature *encouraged* mothers to be intrusive — always there, always caring, almost totally involved with children. The working wife was seen as an aberration. The father's role was seen as economic and supportive of mother and child, and on the whole he escaped censure (Poster, 1978).

In the last decade researchers have become increasingly aware that the role of the father is greater than formerly accepted, and that its importance starts as early as the birth of his child. However, less is known about the role father plays and the extent to which it is in direct interaction with the child or mediated through the mother or brothers and sisters. Greater knowledge of the father's role in families is of particular interest because when families separate mothers tend to keep the children and it is the father-child relationship which is most likely to be disrupted (Lamb, 1976).

Many misconceptions about parental responsibility for children's problems have arisen, in part, by tracing adults' problems back to possible childhood causes. Freud took this approach in his work. Yet studies of 'normal' or 'successful' people often demonstrate just as many unsuitable conditions in their childhoods. External supports may soften the impact of trauma — supports such as other sources of love, strong hobbies or interests and peer support in the community (Skolnick, 1978).

In this study the Australian Institute of Family Studies wanted to find out more about what Australian children feel about their parents — their relationships with their fathers as well as their mothers, whether they are satisfied with the time parents spend with them, and the interest and help parents give them. Who are children closest to in the family and why? Who do they spend most time with? It is sometimes recommended by 'experts' that parents spend more time with children, but society needs to look at whether children themselves want or need this extra time — time in itself may mean nothing, it depends on what is done with the time.

Past research on children's perceptions of their parents indicates that children usually see mothers as warm, nurturing, and more involved with cooking and housework; fathers are seen as more dominant, more playful, but capable of anger and sometimes a little bit frightening.

"She likes working around the house, she likes cooking, she's a good mother and she does like coming places with us."
Boy, aged 9

The work of Lamb (1976) in the US, and of Graeme Russell (1980) and Don Edgar in Australia all suggest that the father has been a forgotten figure in child development. Given that males have held the dominant power and authority positions within society for so long, it is extraordinary to have supposed their very presence and behaviour in the home were unimportant to children . . . To assume that the mother is most important in a child's life because she spends most time with it is clearly unsatisfactory, because it takes for granted the actual quality of interaction between mother and child. Mother may often be present without interacting with the child (Institute of Family Studies, 1983d).

Parents (at times fearing the worst) sometimes wonder what their children think of them, particularly if they are the parents of adolescents. We wanted to give children the opportunity of speaking about their parents and, to avoid a limited or stereotyped perspective, to talk about them from as many angles as possible. We also wished to see to what extent children saw their parents only as parents, and to what extent they saw them also as individuals with their own skills, interests and limitations.

We asked each child to describe both parents (separately) in their own words. To get some sense of the individuality of the parents as seen by the child, we also asked a question about the things each parent was 'best at' and what each parent was 'no good at'. In addition, to obtain an idea of the quality of the relationship between parent and child, we asked (separately for each parent) whether the children felt their parents were interested in the things they did, whether they thought their parents spent enough time with them, and whether their parents talked much to them. In a separate section of the interview schedule on 'fears', we also asked children if they were ever afraid of their parents.

Mothers
as described by primary school children

THE PREDOMINANT IMAGE of mothers, as described by primary school children, is positive. Some of the descriptions are entirely favourable.

She likes working around the house, she likes cooking, she's a good mother and she does like coming places with us (Boy aged 9).

•

Same as my Dad. Caring, helpful, working (Boy aged 9).

•

She's always talking and she's nice. She's got long black hair and everybody says that she looks like a witch. She's a nice person because she always helps you if you're in trouble. But she doesn't stick up for you or anything if you're in a fight. You have to fight it your own way. She says you have to fight your own battles. She's a nice person, and I like my Mum (Girl aged 9).

However, most children did not see their mothers in purely black and white terms. The majority of children described them very positively as 'nice', 'good', 'happy' and then went on to qualify this with some less favourable aspects of their personalities and role as mothers. Usually the children could see good reasons for the less favourable ways of behaving.

She's happy, she's joyful, she's a very happy person, but she can get grumpy very easily when she's tired now that she's pregnant (Girl aged 9).

•

Funny. Sometimes she makes me mad — 'cause when I don't do the right thing she tells me off (Boy aged 9).

•

She's a good mother. Sometimes she says no to things — like if I ask for an icypole, she'd say no. It'd be all right though 'cause she's a good mother (Boy aged 9).

•

A few children gave purely physical descriptions of their mothers:

She's got black curly hair. She's big. Sometimes she wears jeans and sometimes she wears dresses (Girl aged 9).

•

She's got short hair, blue eyes, ears pierced (Girl aged 9).

•

Generally mothers were described in terms associated with the traditional maternal role such as 'nice', 'caring', and good at cooking, looking after children, or disciplining them. Nevertheless, some children in their descriptions captured qualities both physical and personal which evoked wonderfully individual images.

Interestingly, it was children in stepfamilies and one-parent families who tended to describe their mothers in a more detailed and evocative way. Perhaps this was because children in these families had seen their mothers cope with a variety of life situations rather than with just the traditional maternal role.

She's a nice mother. She's funny — she's got a sense of humour. She's got hair about that long — just sits on her shoulders. She's got a bump on her nose (Boy aged 9, stepfamily).

•

She speaks a fair bit of slang. She's a bit fussy, likes to have everything done. She smokes a lot but not heavily (Girl aged 9, one-parent family).

•

She's a gypsy — she dresses up like one. She wears all these style clothes. She wears make-up all the time, to go out places (Boy aged 9, stepfamily).

Stepmothers — as described by primary school children

AS THERE ARE INCREASING numbers of children living in stepfamilies we wanted to know more about children's views of step-parents. Stepmothers in fairy tales are usually described as 'wicked' or 'evil' and hence society's expectations of stepmothers may be negatively coloured. For this reason in this research study the Institute of Family Studies was particularly interested in children's perceptions of their stepmothers.

Four of the primary school children in the sample lived with their fathers and stepmothers. Only one of these children was rather negative about his stepmother:

Well, she looks after us all right, but I don't know nothing else about her. Sometimes all right, sometimes bad. She tells us off for running in the house (Boy aged 9).

•

One child saw his stepmother in very favourable terms:

She's exactly the same as me Dad. She's really, really nice and good (Boy aged 9).

•

The other two children could see both good and bad in their stepmothers but were favourably disposed to them:

A nice person. When she gets mean, she's mean. But when she's not in a grumpy mood she's really nice (Girl aged 8).

•

Light hair and curls in the back, blue eyes and goes to a lot of parties. She yells at us when we're naughty sometimes, otherwise she's really good (Boy aged 9).

•

On the whole, the image of the 'wicked stepmother' does not appear in these descriptions, but the number of children involved is too small to come to any firm conclusions.

Mothers — as described by secondary school children

DESCRIPTIONS OF MOTHERS given by adolescents are rather different from those of the younger children. They have an added sensitivity to the personal qualities of their mothers and in many cases greater tolerance and understanding. This increased capacity for sensitivity and reflection is related to the greater maturity of this older age group and the ability to cope with more abstract ideas. There were variations however, with a few children still giving quite concrete descriptions of their mothers.

Adolescents from 'intact', two-parent families generally had quite favourable views of their mothers. When they were critical of some behaviour it was usually with some understanding of the reasons behind it.

Kind, considerate. She hasn't stayed back in the late 1800s like my Dad. Always prepared to listen to you. It doesn't matter what you have to say — she looks at things very objectively
(Girl aged 15).

•

She's pretty agreeable — she never creates arguments. She's pretty strict — she likes things done right and my bedroom to be tidy. She doesn't go out of her way to try and create hassles but she does yell. She's a real warrior! She likes to know where we are all the time, what we're doing. She doesn't like us to roam around. She likes to know about what time we'll be home and things like that (Boy aged 16).

•

She's an idealist. I don't know, she's always got her ideas — opinions and things like that. She's always got things she wants to do and it's hard to explain further
(Girl aged 16).

•

"She's an idealist. I don't know, she's always got her ideas — opinions and things like that. She's always got things she wants to do and it's hard to explain further."
Girl, aged 16

Mothers in one-parent families — as described by secondary school children

SOME AMBIVALENCE towards their mothers was more apparent in the descriptions given by adolescents living with their mothers only. While many children were very positive and favourably disposed to their single mothers, a few had quite negative feelings. At times they saw their own behaviour as evoking negative responses in their mothers.

She's nice. We're pretty close to her since we've been through a lot with my father. She helps us in every way she can. Really good to us
(Girl aged 15, lives with mother only).

•

Friendly, a bit stern sometimes, good-looking for her age. She's got a sense of humour. She's all right
(Boy aged 15, lives with mother only).

•

The kind of person you know is smart but you know they haven't had the education to make them more intelligent. She's kind. Doesn't care what we do as long as we don't kill ourselves, or get ourselves put in gaol. She really does care but she gives us our freedom. She's the kind of person who . . . you can't describe her. She knows how to control you if you do something wrong, then again gives you freedom
(Boy aged 15, lives with mother only).

■

Since she's left Dad, she's got a lot more self-centred. She said, 'I've been putting up with it for 40 years or whatever, now I'm going to go out'. Now she does what she wants to do. She looks a bit younger than she really is. All into spending heaps of money on herself. Changes her hair every week — fat and short (Girl aged 16, lives with mother only).

•

Hard question. She's all right. I get spoiled I know that. She spoils me. I keep nagging at her. She's all right. She tries to help me work out my problems but I always make it into an argument (Girl aged 15, lives with mother only).

•

When children lived in stepfamilies with their mothers and stepfathers (or de facto stepfathers), the descriptions were very similar to those of children living with their single mothers. The picture was quite favourable although there were a few exceptions.

Stepmothers — as described by secondary school children

THERE WERE EIGHT children at secondary school level living with their fathers and stepmothers (or de facto stepmothers). Once again there was little evidence to support the 'wicked stepmother' label. Only one boy (aged 15) said he did not like his stepmother but did not elaborate on his reasons. Otherwise, most of these adolescents appeared to be very favourably disposed to their stepmothers.

She's very kind, same as Dad. A thoughtful sort of easy person, a really easy person to adjust to. She's very thoughtful, that's about all (Boy aged 15).

•

"Just like Dad, she's not very hard on us. She and Dad hardly ever argue. We get along pretty well and she looks after my sister."
Boy, aged 15

She's nice, easy to get along with. I don't argue much with her (Boy aged 15).

•

Just like Dad, she's not very hard on us. She and Dad hardly ever argue. We get along pretty well and she looks after my sister (Boy aged 15).

Things mothers are best and worst at

WHEN ASKED WHAT THEIR mothers were best at, **primary** school children tended to see mother as best at the traditional female tasks of cooking and housework. The highest proportion (34 per cent) thought their mothers were best at cooking, followed by housework (28 per cent); some (11 per cent) thought she was best at being a good parent or good at her job (11 per cent). Other categories such as helping people, knitting, sewing, were also mentioned. Typical of the answers were:

I think she's good at looking after us. Quite good at swimming. Good at choosing clothes (Girl aged 9).

•

Doing things that most women do and looking after children (Girl aged 8).

•

One child had a slightly different slant:

Burning the meat! She's good at reading! (Boy aged 9).

•

For **secondary** school children the pattern was somewhat different with the largest group (35 per cent) seeing their mothers as best at being good parents. This is possibly because children in this older age group are at the stage of trying to understand themselves and others, and as they become more involved with peers they value the security and support of an understanding parent.

I suppose she's best at helping Dad and me. Most of her life is centred around us although she's got a lot of friends. Like Dad she's good at a lot of things (Girl aged 16).

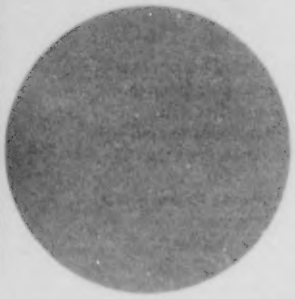
•

Making the family together and running the house. That's all her life (Boy aged 15).

•

A number of adolescents said their mothers were best at cooking (14 per cent) and at their jobs (14 per cent). Housework (12 per cent), knitting and sewing (11 per cent), and personal relations (9 per cent) were also mentioned. Adolescents, like the younger children, tended to see mother as best at things that are traditionally associated with the mother role, with the exception of those who saw her as best at her job.

Children at **both levels** found it more difficult to think of things their mothers were 'no good at'.



The image children have of parents appeared to be that of basically competent people. At both primary school level (18 per cent) and secondary school level (14 per cent) many children thought their mothers were good at everything.

There's nothing really much she's not good at — panel beating maybe, but that's a man's job. There isn't much she's not good at, of ladies' things — what they do (Boy aged 9).

•

At both levels sport was the thing that most children thought their mothers were no good at (26 per cent of primary children, 15 per cent of secondary).

However, quite a number of **secondary** school children thought their mothers were not very good at personal relations.

Last year I failed maths, and I knew that she was really going to go crook at me and I didn't want to go home at all. She's not very good at reassuring people. Like, when I failed she really went off at me and didn't talk to me for a while. I felt that I tried my best in the test but she said, 'Your best wasn't good enough, was it' (Girl aged 15).

•

She understands, but she doesn't understand my point of view. When I want to do something she says, no, you can't do that because so-and-so. I don't really get a chance to see for myself (Girl aged 16).

Time spent with mothers

MOST **PRIMARY** SCHOOL children (82 per cent), thought their mothers spent enough time with them, but quite a number (18 per cent) wished their mothers spent more time with them. **Secondary** school children were more satisfied with the amount of time spent with mothers (89 per cent) although some (12 per cent) wished their mothers spent more time with them.

Of the 30 **primary** school children who expressed a wish that their mothers should spend more time with them, about a third (33 per cent) said their mothers were too busy to do so (of these mothers more than half were not in the paid workforce), and almost the same number (30 per cent) said their mothers worked too long (of these mothers all were employed). The 23 **secondary** school children said much the same, except more (52 per cent) indicated that their mothers were too busy (two thirds of whom were employed) and a large number (30 per cent) said their mothers worked too long. A number of other reasons were also mentioned (mother spending time with other children, or the child did not get on with mother), but only a few children mentioned these reasons.

We asked each child who wanted to spend more time with mother what he or she would like to do with her if this was possible. The largest proportion of **primary** school children (33 per cent) said they would like to play some sort of game, and almost the same number of children (31 per cent) said they would like to go out with her. **Secondary** school children had slightly different wishes, probably because of their age. The greatest number (62 per cent) said they would like to go out somewhere with their mothers, while a large group (43 per cent) wished to talk with their mothers. Homework and being included in things were also mentioned by a few children in both groups.

Mother-child talk

TO GAIN SOME FURTHER understanding of the relationship and communication patterns between mother and child we asked the children if their mothers talked to them much and took an interest in the things they did. As talking can often include comments and instruction as well as conversation we wanted the additional information regarding feelings of maternal interest.

You may remember that there were also questions asked in other sections of the interview schedule about the parent-child relationship. The information from the answers to these questions will be contained in a later report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Most children at **both levels** (90 per cent of primary school children, and 96 per cent of secondary), felt their mothers talked to them a lot. A small number of children (9 per cent primary, and 3 per cent secondary) said their mothers talked to them sometimes. Very few (1 per cent primary and secondary) said their mothers did not talk to them often.

How interested are mothers in their children?

THE MAJORITY OF CHILDREN at both primary and secondary school levels (79 per cent primary, 80 per cent secondary), thought their mothers were very interested in the things they did. However some children said their mothers were only sometimes interested, (16 per cent primary and secondary), and a small number of children (3 per cent primary, 4 per cent secondary) thought their mothers were not very interested.

Fathers
as described by primary school children

OVERALL, THE PRIMARY school children described fathers in a slightly more reserved way than they described mothers but the general feeling towards them was positive — some gave quite affectionate descriptions.

He's kind and helpful and he can be caring (Girl aged 8).

•

He's a good man. If you asked him to do something, he'd probably try and do it his best. He's just a good man (Boy aged 9).

•

He's nice. He likes his work and he's kind to us kids. He likes Mum. He doesn't like slow drivers — he prefers to speed along the road. He's kind to us — that's the main thing (Girl aged 9).

•

Other children's descriptions were mixed and often contained physical descriptions, although still remaining positive.

He's normal — he gets cross easily, but he can be very nice too (Girl aged 8).

•

He likes watching football and going out places. Sometimes he plays with us, sometimes he doesn't — goes back and forth (Boy aged 9).

•

He's got black hair and blue eyes, he's fairly tall and he's nice. Sometimes after school we have fights with him — just play fights (Girl aged 8).

•

He's kind of a happy person, sometimes a bit angry person. He's quite a tall person. He's got a beard and sometimes he gets a bit mad at my brother and me for something we don't do. Has black hair, black beard and sometimes he takes Mummy out to dinner (Girl aged 9).

■

"He's normal — he gets cross easily, but he can be very nice too." Girl, aged 8

Father's work and activities were frequently mentioned and he was generally described in his traditional role as working, playing with children, giving money, and sometimes being bad-tempered or angry.

Stepfathers — as described by primary school children

QUITE A LARGE GROUP OF primary school children (29) lived with their mothers and stepfathers (or de facto stepfathers). Children of divorced parents are more likely to live with stepfathers than with stepmothers and, while stepfathers do not have quite the same negative image as stepmothers in fairy stories, we wanted to examine more closely how children viewed stepfathers. The majority of the younger children were quite favourably disposed to their stepfathers, but the few who did not get on with them were very emphatic.

He's a pretty mean man. Can't think of anything else (Boy aged 9).

•

He's got curly hair and he doesn't shave often. He smokes and he drinks alcohol — a lot of it. He's not very polite. He swears a lot — just about every sentence has got a rude word in it (Girl aged 8).

•

He's OK sometimes, but sometimes he isn't very good. He doesn't help enough. He just sits there and does nothing (Boy aged 9).

■

He smokes a lot. He swears a lot, too, and I don't know what else about him. He asks Mum for money to play the pokies (Boy aged 9).

•

On the other hand, the children who liked their stepfathers were quite approving and liked them for being funny, kind and good and, in at least one case, for being an improvement on the child's real father.

He acts better than my ex-father . . . he's more intelligent and he doesn't call people names (Boy aged 9).

•

Strong, and he's cuddly and he's cute. He's got big sideburns and he's got black hair. He's got tattoos all over his arms (Girl aged 9).

•

Good. He's — I don't know — he's got a beard. He's a funny person — he does funny things (Boy aged 9).

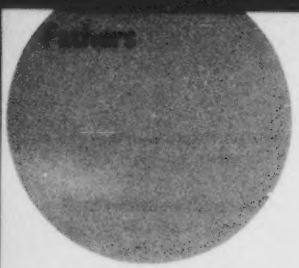
■

Other children described both good and bad aspects of stepfathers, not unlike many of the descriptions of 'real' fathers.

He's a bit bald up here. Got brown hair. He's fat. He's good, except he only goes mean at me if I do something wrong. He's nice (Girl aged 9).

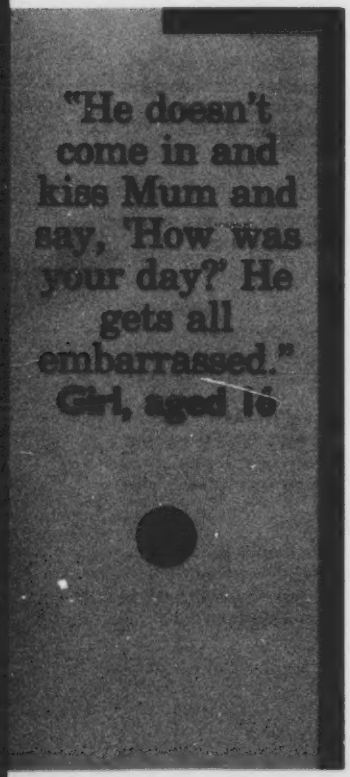
•

There is no doubt that some children do not like their stepfathers, but equally there are children who like them a lot.



Fathers — as described by secondary school children

IN MANY CASES SECONDARY school children gave sensitive descriptions of their fathers just as they did of their mothers. However, the positive and negative extremes were more marked than with mothers, although the overall picture was favourable.

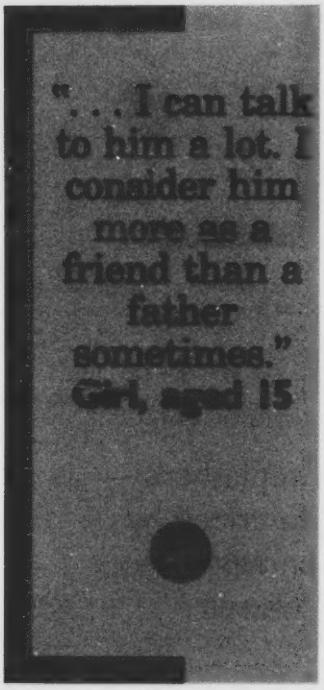


He's a lot of fun. We get on really well together. He doesn't complain about things. He enjoys being around with us. He helps me a lot. I can talk to him a lot. I consider him more as a friend than a father sometimes (Girl aged 15).

■

Well, he's strict, but he's always quick to give a kind word. He'll make you work for things (Boy aged 15).

■



He's a good bloke really. He's a top bloke. He understands. He's 62 years old but he understands everything because he knows he was once young too. So when I try to explain things to him he'll sit down and listen. He wants the best for me. He wants to try his hardest for me because he wants me to have a good life because he didn't have too good a life when he was young. He's a top bloke. He's grouse (Boy aged 15).

■

Sort of overbearing. At times I don't like him, at other times I do. At times he's quite likeable as a person at other times he's not too friendly. He tries to have his will with everyone, to win in every argument. He's never wrong (Boy aged 16).

■

Doesn't like to tie himself down. Totally non-committal. Pretty scatty. Doesn't give money away too easily. Doesn't want to get involved. Just wants to go to the club and talk to his mates and drink (Boy aged 15).

■

He's a man that can't really show affection. Gets embarrassed over those sorts of things. Sometimes this upsets Mum. When he comes home he just sits down and reads the paper. He doesn't come in and kiss Mum and say, 'How was your day?' He gets all embarrassed. We know they love each other but he can't express that (Girl aged 16).

Fathers in one-parent families and stepfamilies — as described by secondary school children

ADOLESCENTS WHO LIVED with their fathers only or with their fathers and stepmothers (or

de facto stepmothers), had usually lived in closer and more intimately dependent relationships with them than children in two-parent, 'intact' families. This closeness showed in many of the descriptions.

He's a good person. Some people see him as stern but to me he's fantastic. He's always looked after us a lot and consoled us in troubles. His main concern is the stability of the family and trying to keep the family together, even through separation
(Boy aged 15, lives with father only).

•

He cares a lot, 'cause most fathers — parents I should say — they just let the kids do what they want, and then try and win them over with money. Dad just cares; he doesn't give us all that much but we know what it's for when he does it for us. We're grateful for it (Boy aged 15, lives with father and de facto stepmother).

•

Great. He's a father anybody would like. He's caring, loving. He's just terrific. I like him (Girl aged 15, lives with father only).

•

However, not all children living with their fathers were as fortunate as this as indicated by the following descriptions.

He's got two personalities. When he's off the grog he's one of the best people I have ever known. But when he's on the grog, I just want to be away as much as I can because I just don't get along with him — we just fight too much (Girl aged 16, lives with father only).

•

My father — actually I can't relate to him very well myself — but everyone else I know gets on really well with him. I've just got this mental block about it. I've tried, but find I get annoyed — upset. He's not a bum or anything like that. He's really good. He's open in a lot of ways. If you want to talk about things like smoking or the pill, he'd really open up and speak to you about it. I just can't relate to him as well as my brother and sisters can
(Girl aged 15, lives with father only).

Stepfathers — as described by secondary school children

THERE WERE FEWER positive and more negative feelings expressed by adolescents towards stepfathers than towards 'real' fathers. Although some children liked their stepfathers they tended to say, 'He's all right — but . . .'. Other adolescents were quite negative in their feelings but then would qualify their descriptions with some positive statements. The following are some examples of how adolescents felt about their stepfathers.

He behaves real well. He's got a quick temper. He gets put out real easy. He's a great guy I reckon. He's really good to me and my little brother and sister — gives us everything (Boy aged 16).

•

Caring. He's a little bit quick-tempered (Boy aged 16).

•

He's good. I suppose. Very one-sided and one-eyed. Everything has to go his way. He's a really nice guy (Girl aged 16).

•

He's a bit hard to get on with. He tends to take work out on Mum and I. I suppose he's all right. He's pretty stubborn and tends to get really sarcastic (Boy aged 15).

•

Not a very listening person. Ask him a question and he interprets it wrongly. Tells you what he wants to tell you, not what you want to know. Pretty hard to get along with . . . builds up tension and then lets it all out in one go. He drinks a lot and everything seems to revolve around that (Boy aged 16).

Things fathers are best and worst at

FATHER'S TRADITIONAL role is that of family breadwinner and the largest group of children at both levels (38 per cent of primary, 46 per cent of secondary) said their fathers were best at their jobs. The next most popular reply for **primary** school children was fixing things (19 per cent), and making things (18 per cent). A young boy described how his stepfather was best at making things:

Well, making things really, like electrical things with batteries and buttons. He likes doing things like that (Boy aged 8).

•

However, **secondary** school children nominated 'being a good parent' (18 per cent) as the second most popular category, followed by fixing things (11 per cent). At secondary level, as indicated earlier, adolescents are more likely to be concerned with their relationships with their parents and to appreciate good qualities in parents as well as protesting about negative ones.

I suppose the fact is that he cares about us and helps out and he is going to work to pay for us and keeping us (Girl aged 15).

•

He's a bit of a smooth talker. I think it'd be his job. The old ladies like him (Girl aged 16).

•

A wide range of other activities which children thought their fathers were best at were also mentioned. These ranged from sport, gardening and working with mechanical things to being good at everything. For instance, one 8-year-old girl said her father was best at *talking to his garden*. No differences emerged for children living in different types of families.

When we asked children what their fathers were 'no good at', the pattern of response mirrored that of responses to what fathers were best at. Just as quite a number of

children saw their fathers as best at particular aspects of the traditional father role, some children saw their fathers as not very good at the same things. A large number of children at both levels (38 per cent primary, 46 per cent secondary) thought their fathers were not very good at their jobs. For **primary** school children the next most mentioned things were fixing things (19 per cent) and making things (18 per cent).

He's not very good at fixing things. He doesn't use his brain a lot. I have to think for him — not all the time — most of the time (Boy aged 10).

•

However, **secondary** school children varied a little in their responses with 'being a good parent' (18 per cent) followed by fixing things (11 per cent) being mentioned frequently as things that father was no good at.

He's no good at things with his hands, such as carpentry. And he doesn't push us on as much as Mum does like when we're late. You can see him getting crosser and crosser but he lets us take the consequences for ourselves — I don't know whether that's good or bad (Girl aged 15).

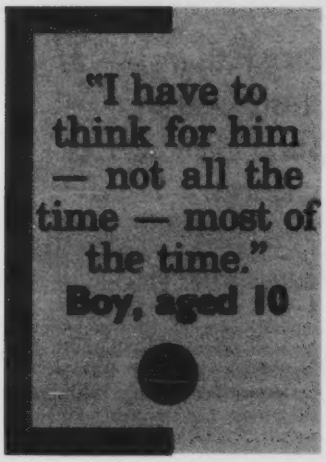
•

Cooking. Shopping for food and things — he usually gets the wrong stuff (Girl aged 15).

•

According to children at both age levels, fathers were unskilled at many other things. These ranged from helping people and reading, to cooking and gardening.

Stepfathers in particular came in for some criticism for the things they were no good at.



He doesn't hold the family together very well. If there's anything out of place he'll completely fly off the handle. He can't control himself and if anything is said to him he takes it out on you. He's a bit of a hypocrite. Makes one rule for himself and one for everybody else (Girl aged 15).

■

Sometimes he's not very patient with my mother because he's very different from my Dad, because he doesn't like school work. My stepfather's not impartial with me because I'm like him (Girl aged 16).

Time spent with fathers

MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT it is more important for mothers to give their attention to the children than for fathers to do so. Recent research, including our own at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, is showing that fathers are equally important to children. Furthermore, research also indicates that many fathers may continue to give the required attention even when no longer living in the household. Sometimes it is natural fathers living in traditional two-parent families who fail in this respect.

When we asked the children if they thought their fathers spent enough time with them, more secondary school children (74 per cent) were satisfied with the amount of time than were primary school children (58 per cent). More primary school children (40 per cent) than secondary school children (25 per cent) wished their fathers spent more time with them. Where children were living with stepfathers they were less inclined to want more time with them than when they lived with their natural fathers.

Children who felt their fathers did not spend enough time with them were asked why they thought this was so. Most primary school children (68 per cent), and many secondary school children (42 per cent) felt their fathers worked too long to spend more time with them. The next most mentioned reason was that they were too busy (33 per cent primary, 33 per cent secondary). Other things such as father being too tired, or away a lot, or spending time with other children also rated a mention.

We asked these children who wanted to spend more time with their fathers (59 primary children, 40 secondary) what they would like to do with them. The largest group of primary children (64 per cent) wanted to play games; fewer secondary children (30 per cent) wanted to play games with their fathers. Many primary (34 per cent) and even more secondary (50 per cent) children wanted to go out somewhere with their fathers, and the next most mentioned activity for both age groups was talking with fathers (15 per cent primary, 18 per cent secondary). Other activities such as doing homework, working and being included in things were each suggested by a few children in both age groups. The patterns of wishes for children living in different family types were very similar.

Father-child talk

TALKING IS THE MOST important aspect of interpersonal communication and is involved in the learning of literacy skills as well as passing on information, conveying affection, and giving instruction. For this reason we asked the children if their fathers talked to them much. Seventy-five per cent of the **primary** children said their fathers talked to them a lot, a further 11 per cent said sometimes, and 13 per cent said not very much. Seventy-three per cent of **secondary** children said their fathers talked to them a lot, 14 per cent said sometimes, and 13 per cent said not very much. The pattern was very much the same at both levels. However, when broken down by family type, stepfathers at both age levels were less likely to talk to the children a lot.

How interested are fathers in their children?

AS ALREADY MENTIONED, talk is not necessarily conversation — it may consist largely of instruction or command. For this reason we wanted to find out if children thought their fathers were interested in the things they did. Most children at both primary school level (61 per cent) and secondary school level (64 per cent) felt that their fathers were very interested in the things they did. Quite a number of children at both levels (24 per cent primary, 24 per cent secondary) thought their fathers were sometimes interested, while only a small percentage of children (9 per cent primary, 12 per cent secondary) felt their fathers were not very interested in what they did.

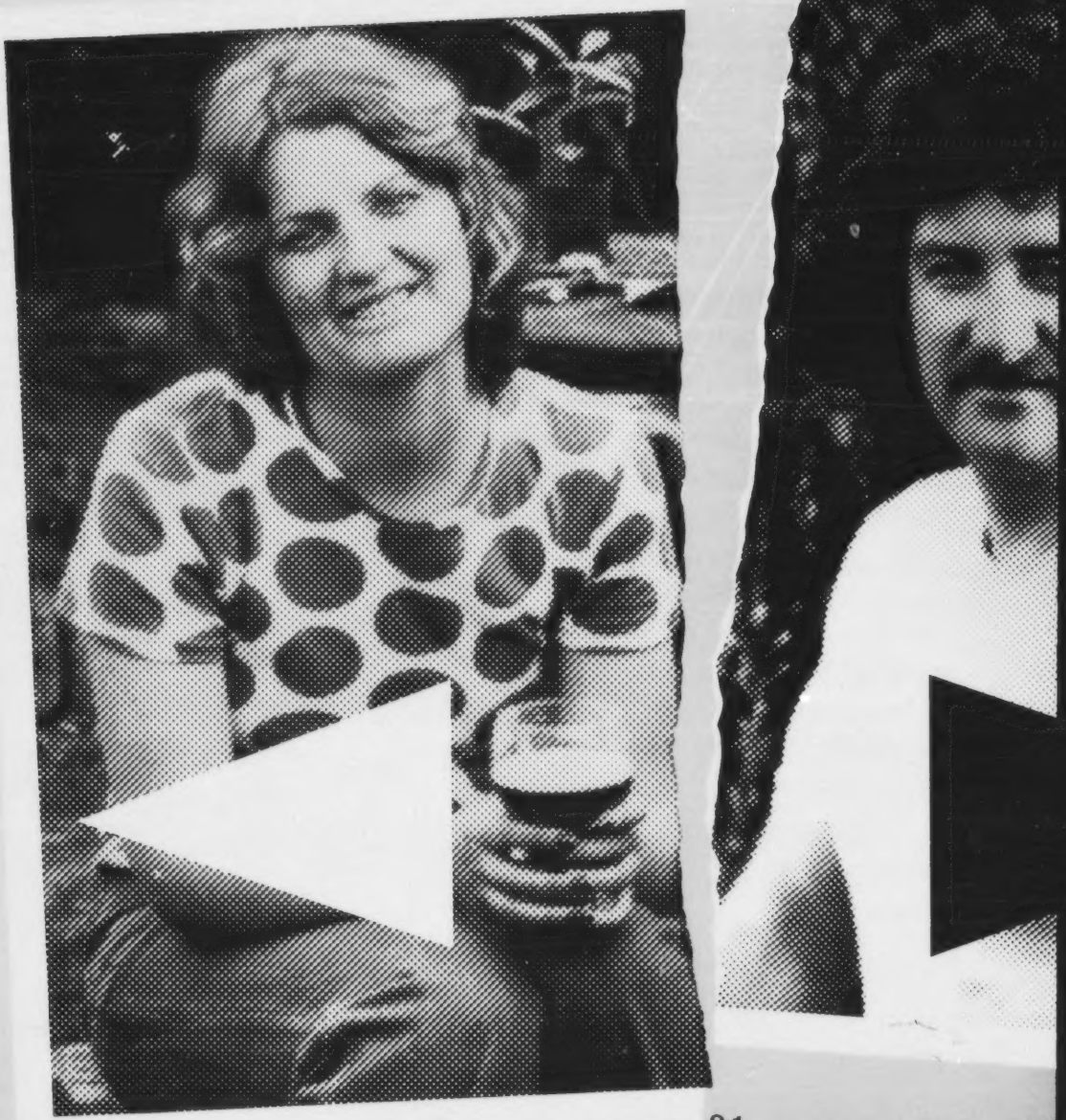
As might be expected, we found stepfathers were less likely to be very interested in what the children did (at primary level, 55 per cent of stepfathers compared with 62 per cent of natural fathers; at secondary level, 52 per cent of stepfathers compared with 68 per cent of natural fathers).

Mothers and fathers

Children's fear of parents

INCLUDED IN THE INTERVIEW was a question about a number of things children sometimes fear. This list included among other items dogs, spiders, nuclear war and fear of each parent. When we asked children if they were ever afraid of their fathers or stepfathers or if they were ever afraid of their mothers or stepmothers a little over a quarter of the children at both age levels (28 per cent primary, 29 per cent secondary), said they were sometimes afraid of their fathers or stepfathers. There were no differences in proportions of children afraid of stepfathers. About a quarter of primary children (25 per cent) were sometimes afraid of their mothers, but few secondary children were afraid of their mothers (13 per cent). Only a few children lived with stepmothers or de facto stepmothers. Of the primary children in this situation none reported any fear of their stepmothers; at secondary level two children said they were afraid. However, this number is too small to have any significance.

How children feel parents separate



when their or divorce

"I felt a bit sad, but I've got another mother who is probably as good . . ."
Boy, aged 9

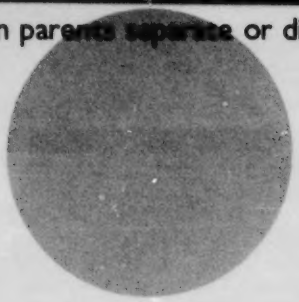
WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE or divorce, there is always concern about the effects on the children, especially in cases where parents wrangle over custody and access arrangements. Grandparents and other relatives can become involved too and may be anxious about ongoing relationships as well as long-term consequences; friends and neighbours may be both concerned and curious; and society in general expresses anxiety through the media about the situation of these children.

In the majority of families it is the mother who retains custody of the children. Some access parents find it difficult to keep up a regular commitment to their children for a variety of reasons (some move away, some fear they may be upsetting their children and cease to make contact) but most continue some relationship with their children.

We know from previous research that the period of separation (and just before separation) is more traumatic for children than the actual divorce, except in cases where there is severe ongoing conflict over child custody or property. The child who has no idea whatever that his or her parents are not getting on or are unhappy is shocked by the separation. The child's intimate family world is shattered and he or she experiences a sudden loss, not just of a parent, but of many household routines and habits of a short lifetime. Other children are well aware long before separation that their parents are fighting and not getting on. For these children, the actual separation may be a relief from tension.

However, it is not easy for either parents or children for the first twelve months to two years after separation. First, there is almost always a sudden decline in the standard of living as income is divided or one parent becomes reliant on the meagre Supporting Parent Benefit. Second, there is often a lowering in the standard of housing for the parent who leaves the family home and sometimes for both parents if the home is sold. For children, changes in housing often mean changes in school, loss of friends and discontinuity in their schoolwork.

Also, in the first stages of single parenting some purely practical problems arise. The tasks which were formerly the responsibility of the absent parent must either be taken over by the remaining parent or be redistributed among the children. Parents of very young children are often exhausted by these extra tasks together with the responsibility of making



necessary decisions alone. Older children often become very responsible and of great assistance to the remaining parent. This can have both good and bad aspects. On the one hand, children grow up quickly and learn to do things for themselves; on the other hand, they may miss out on much of the fun and freedom of childhood. Boys sometimes make efforts to take their fathers' places and to assume their responsibilities. To a lesser extent girls living alone with their fathers may assume their mothers' responsibilities (Weiss, 1979, 1981).

The parents who no longer live with the children (that is, the access parents) also experience some difficulties. The occasions when their children visit and/or stay may be their first experience of caring and cooking for them by themselves. Mostly it is fathers in this situation. Some fathers may not cook well or may not know what sort of food to give the children. What to do with the children on these occasions may also be a difficulty for access parents.

For children, the separation of parents may be only the first of several major changes in their lives, all of which can cause tremendous emotional strain. This stress occurs when parents are least able to support them because of the pressure of their own anxieties, guilt and problems associated with the marriage breakdown. This is so whether the parent is the 'leaver' or the 'left'.

Many custodial parents, including those who instigated the separation or divorce, have great difficulty in taking total responsibility for the household, at least initially. They are often afraid of being rejected by their children if they are severe, and thus have difficulty with discipline. The access parents who see their children at set times may also have difficulties with discipline and organisation. Sometimes they try to buy the love of their children with gifts which the custodial parent could not afford, and this can add to the general strain by making the custodial parent feel angry or jealous and inadequate. Some access parents rarely see their children because of the difficulties, or they cease to see them at all. In these cases the children often feel rejected by the absent parent and may become depressed or angry.

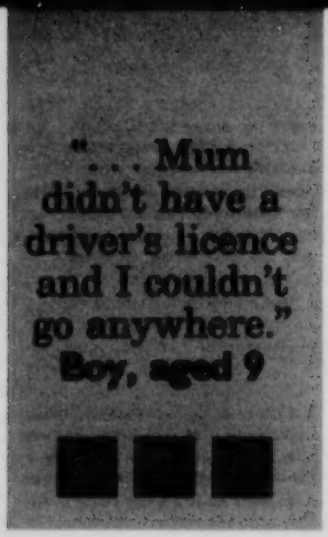
"... I was hoping they would be able to patch things up."
Boy, aged 15

At the time of separation very young children frequently become insecure, whining and clinging to any available adult. Because they cannot fully understand what is happening these little children may blame themselves. Older children usually understand what is happening but feel confused and angry (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980).

After the first twelve months to two years, many of the difficulties in one-parent families ease and life becomes more routine and less stressed and as parents and family life settle down so, usually, do the children. Some researchers point out that some children may continue to feel very sad about the situation at one level, but understand and accept it at another (Kurdek and Seisky, 1980; Kurdek, Blisk and Seisky, 1981).

There are two major reasons why there is such widespread concern about children whose parents separate or divorce. The first is the obvious one that most children are very upset at the separation of their parents, and this may continue for quite a while until life circumstances settle. During this time, relatives, friends and sometimes teachers are aware of the child's distress. However, many fail to realise that in most cases this stage passes and behaviour problems, or stress-related symptoms, disappear. The second and even more influential reason is that early research over-emphasised the negative impact on children of divorce/separation. Researchers used samples of delinquents or children with behaviour problems, and they searched for common background factors. Often they found some of these children came from 'broken homes'. However, they did not look further to find out why other children grew up quite well adjusted in one-parent families, nor what other factors may have been operating in the families of the delinquents. The cause of the problem was seen to be 'father absence' (Levitin, 1979; Longfellow, 1979).

In a review of research of the effects of parent-child separation Michael Rutter (1971), a psychiatrist, pointed out that while past studies linked parental separation and divorce with delinquency and anti-social behaviour in children, parental death is not linked. This supports his argument that it is not so much the loss of a parent that leads to behaviour problems and delinquency but disturbed interpersonal relationships in the family. Other researchers have also supported this position with research indicating that interpersonal family processes and parental harmony are more related to child adjustment, behaviour and achievement than is family type. For instance, severe family conflict has some detrimental effects on children in *all* family types, just as children



do well in harmonious, warm families whether they be one-parent, two-parent or stepfamily (Hess and Camara, 1979; Raschke and Raschke, 1979; Ellison, 1983; Dunlop and Burns, 1983; Ochiltree and Amato, 1983).

Nevertheless, in the public mind there is still a residue of the ideas put forward by earlier research linking delinquency and anti-social behaviour with children from one-parent families. In addition, information which gives a positive picture of the child in the one-parent family can be misinterpreted as being anti-marriage and against traditional family life, and therefore at times does not receive full coverage. In the Institute's sample there were 82 **primary** school children who had experienced the separation or divorce of their parents. Of these, 30 children lived in stepfamilies, 51 in one-parent families, and one child lived with neither parent. In 7 families the mother no longer lived with the children. The age of all these children when their parents separated ranged from infancy to 9 years, but the average (median) age overall was 4.5 years. For most of the young children in our sample, it was several years since their parents separated. However, children living in stepfamilies were, on average, slightly younger (3 years) at the time of separation than those in one-parent families (5 years).

The parents of 81 of the **secondary** school children in the sample had separated or divorced. Of these 35 older children lived in stepfamilies, 45 in one-parent families, and one child lived with neither parent. In 12 families it was the mother who no longer lived with the children. The age of the children at the time of parent separation ranged between 1 year and 17 years, with an average (median) age of 8.5 years. For most of these older children also it was several years since their parents separated. Once again, children living in stepfamilies were, on average, younger (7 years) at the time of separation than those in one-parent families (9 years).

Many people, including both access and custodial parents, and the children themselves, are interested to know how others in similar circumstances cope. We asked the children how they felt at the time of their parents' separation and how they felt about it now. We also asked several questions about the relationship between the parent no longer living in the household and the child interviewed.

Primary school children

MANY OF THE YOUNGER children were very upset when their parents left but they also had a quite solid and practical concern about themselves.

I felt a bit sad, but I've got another mother who is probably as good (or might even be a bit better), so I'm still happy (Boy aged 9).

•

I wasn't happy. I used to cry (Girl aged 9).

•

I felt horrible, because then I thought I didn't have a father, and then Mum didn't have a driver's licence and I couldn't go anywhere (Boy aged 9).

•

I don't know how I feel, 'cause he leaves and he comes home (Girl aged 9).

•

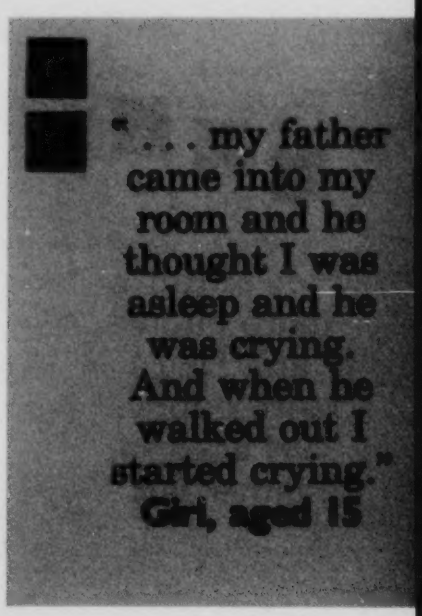
First I went with Mum, then I didn't like it with her 'cause she was married to a man and I didn't like it. Then I went back to Dad, and me Dad got married. This is my problem — I go and live with me Dad, then I go and live with me Mum, because I love them both (Boy aged 9).

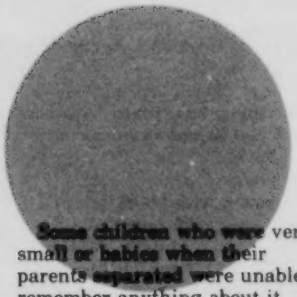
•

However, a girl expressed feelings of relief about her father leaving that were typical of children who had been stressed by parental conflict:

When Dad was happy he was nice, but sometimes he got mad and then he got pretty mean. It was pretty quiet when he was gone, and after that I got used to it. I was relieved that he wouldn't belt any of us up and smack us or do anything bad to us (Girl aged 9).

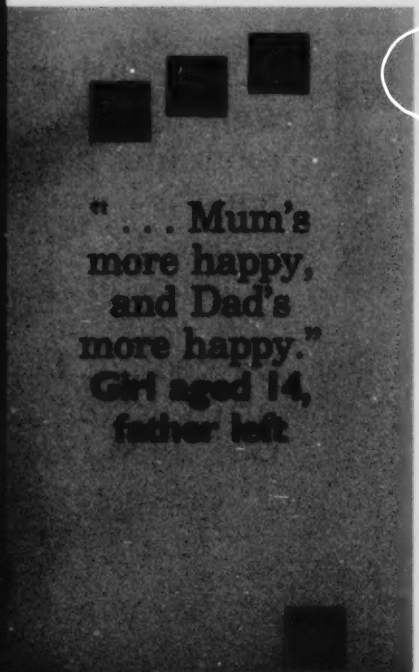
•


". . . my father came into my room and he thought I was asleep and he was crying. And when he walked out I started crying."
Girl, aged 15



Some children who were very small or babies when their parents separated were unable to remember anything about it. They usually accepted their present situation, but it was quite common for children to have fantasies or wishes of their parents getting together again, even when their parents thought the situation had been made quite clear to them. One girl was clear about her wishes that her parents should get together again:

I think it is better now because they used to have fights and that. I think it's a lot better, but I am worried because Mum's going to get married again and I don't want that to happen because I think Mum and Dad will make it again because they've changed a lot now after that divorce (Girl aged 8).



Secondary school children

ADOLESCENTS ARE MORE able to express in some depth their feelings about the separation of parents than are the younger children. A number of these older children were obviously aware that things were wrong between their parents, while others were quite shocked by the separation. Occasionally, they were aware of the trouble but thought their parents would sort it out.

I felt really sad, really upset. I felt like I was a rag doll being pulled by both arms because they both wanted me. Didn't know which way to turn (Girl aged 15).

•

I felt pretty shaken. I think most changes do that to you. You get amazed at how quickly you adjust. There was no anger, couldn't put the blame on anyone. I got a bit upset about the way my mother took it. She didn't take it very well at all. She was pretty shattered for about a year (Girl aged 15).

•

Well, I knew it had to come because he'd been living away from home for ages. He just came home for a drink of beer. That's all. I knew it'd eventually come. I'd already been prepared. He just came home, drank beer and then he'd go off (Boy aged 15).

•

I felt sad. Because I didn't know what went on before. I thought he was my real Dad. When he came to visit us — he'd take us out once a fortnight. When he'd bring us home I'd go into my room and cry — that was the thing, I didn't want him to go. Then after a while I got used to it, because I saw how much my Mum didn't like him. Because they used to fight a lot, it ended up in a real big fight (Girl aged 15).

•

I sort of felt — it's hard to describe — like, disappointed — because I was hoping that they would be able to patch things up. But when you realise that it wasn't going to work I suppose it was the best thing (Boy aged 15).

•

Some adolescents who were very young at the time of the separation do not remember well or have only vague impressions.

It didn't really worry me because I was only 6 at the time. Everyone now says they're sorry if they know Mum and Dad are divorced. It doesn't really worry me (Boy aged 16).

•

I'm not sure, I was only 9. Can't remember. I think I was depressed. I remember my father came into my room and he thought I was asleep and he was crying. And when he walked out I started crying. Now I've got used to the idea, so I don't mind (Girl aged 15).

•

As with some of the younger children, for some adolescents it was a relief when the separation finally occurred.

Well, I didn't really mind because my Mum and Dad had a lot of arguments all the time. It was really upsetting so I didn't really like it. I was sort of glad — not really glad — but I didn't mind it. (Girl aged 17).

•

Well, we were relieved in one way because of the arguments. They used to argue every night. Then again we missed him, because I've always got on better with my father than my mother. But I don't mind because I can go up to Dad's any night of the week. I've always got a bed there (Boy aged 16).

•

Some of the saddest replies came from adolescents describing how they felt when their mothers left.

I felt how everyone else would feel if your Mum left — real bad, sad. Can't express it properly — but you just feel like the whole world's going to end in a matter of days, but it never does (Girl aged 16).

•

I felt bewildered — I didn't know why she left. It was between my mother and father. I thought she couldn't really care for us if she just left us. Later I figured out it wasn't that (Boy aged 16).

•

I felt lonely, but my eldest sister took the place of Mum so we turned to her (Girl aged 16).

How children adjust to separation and divorce

WHEN ASKED HOW THEY now felt about the separation of their parents most children (42 per cent) at both levels had accepted it, a further group (22 per cent) said they did not care any more, some (12 per cent) who had been pleased when their parents separated remained pleased about it. However, a sizeable group (23 per cent) remained upset or wished the parent who had left would come back. The following is a broad selection of statements from children indicating their feelings about how the separation of their parents affected them now.

I don't feel very upset. Like, I'm a tiny little bit upset, but I'm still very happy with the mother I've got (Boy aged 9, mother left).

•

I feel better than I would usually be when he was there (Girl aged 9, father left).

•

I want him to come back (Girl aged 9, father left).

•

I feel a bit sad and I wish that they would get back together again — just so we could be a whole family again (Girl aged 9, father left).

•

I'm glad in a way he's gone — because of the way he treats me. And he promises the other kids so much and has never done anything about it (Girl aged 15, father left).

•

I don't really mind — it doesn't worry me the slightest little bit. Mum's happy now — Dad isn't. I like Dad but I haven't got that much sympathy for him (Boy aged 15, father left).

•

Can't imagine Mum and Dad being together because they're very different now. And I think perhaps that was the best, because Mum and I have a very good relationship, I reckon. And I don't think that would've been — not that it wouldn't have been good — but the relationship that's there now wouldn't have been possible. And Mum's more happy, and Dad's more happy (Girl aged 14, father left).

•

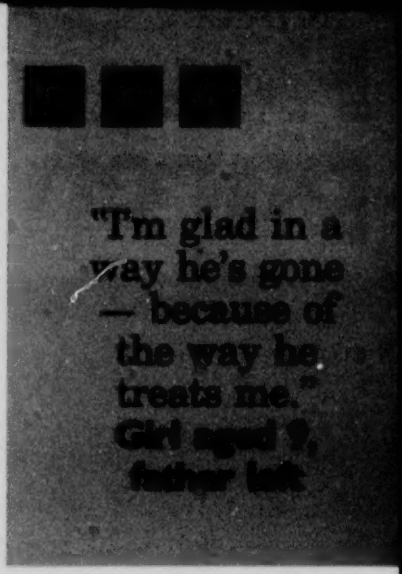
I've still always got that wish that they'd get back together again. But I don't think they ever will, so I've just learned to accept it (Girl aged 16, mother left).

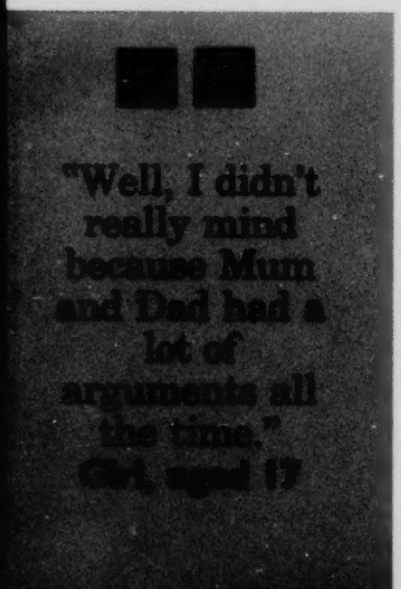
•

I feel awful still. I wish they were together but my Mum's happier now so I'm glad they're divorced — plus I don't like my father (Girl aged 15, father left).

•

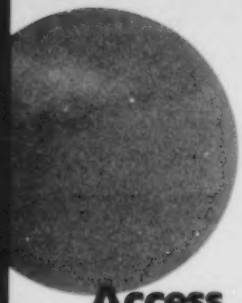
I don't think I'd have it any other way really. I've grown accustomed to it — just doesn't worry me. Speak about it freely (Boy aged 16, mother left).





How children feel a parents

bout access



Access mothers — as described by primary and secondary school children

NINETEEN CHILDREN (7 primary, 12 secondary) in the sample no longer lived with their mothers. Of the seven **primary** school children, 4 continued to see their mothers regularly with 1 child seeing mother once a week, 2 once a fortnight and the other child seeing mother less often. The visiting arrangements varied; 2 children stayed with their mothers when they saw them, one just visited, and another child sometimes stayed and sometimes visited. The mothers and children did all sorts of things together — went on outings, played or worked together.

Mum lives next to the gardens — we sometimes walk down there, and we do the shopping and weed the garden. She lives in a flat. We play ball, do cooking — making biscuits, chocolate cake and that (Girl aged 8).

•

Two of the children felt they spent enough time with their mothers. As one of them said:

Mum gets pretty grouchy. I think she spends enough time with me. (Girl aged 8).

•

However, 2 children wished they could spend more time with their mothers and would like to go out with her if there was more time. Only 1 of the children did not know if her mother was interested in the things she did, 2 others felt their mothers were very interested and another child felt mother was sometimes interested.

Nine of the 12 **secondary** school children who no longer lived with their mothers continued to have regular contact with her. One saw mother daily, 2 once a week, 2 once a fortnight, 2 once a month, 1 less often still, and 1 wasn't sure. Like the primary children, the form of their visits varied. Four of these older children stayed with their mothers regularly, 4 visited only, and 1 sometimes stayed and sometimes visited. Their activities while with their mothers were also varied. They sometimes stayed home, sometimes went on outings, often talked together and sometimes worked.

We sit down and talk or she comes down and takes us [motorbike] riding. That's about it (Boy aged 15).

•

Two of these older children wished they could spend more time with their mothers but the rest were satisfied. One boy explained why he didn't want more time with his mother:

I don't mind how much time she spends. I'm not that close to her (Boy aged 15).

•

Older children were sometimes so involved with their own activities that they felt they could not spare more time to be with the access parent. One boy explained it this way:

She wants to spend more time with me, and I just keep telling her it would be boring for her because every weekend we go out riding with the bikes. That's the only time we can ride them. She says, 'That doesn't matter as long as you're there' (Boy aged 15).

•

One child wanted more time to talk to her mother. Seven of the adolescents felt their mothers were very interested in the things they did. As one girl put it:

She's like a mother hen — clucks around her children (Girl aged 16).

•

The picture that emerged of these access mothers from the child's perspective ranged from very positive to quite ambivalent. For example, one young girl described her mother this way:

She has quite long hair. She's very tall. She usually wears jeans and that. She's very nice to me, but when my brother comes on the scene she starts growling because we always start fights. And he always refuses to do things that Mum says, because Mum's quite weak. She can't handle us. She doesn't know how to handle us because she's been away from us for a long time (Girl aged 8).

•

An older boy was definite in his negative attitude:

I don't like her that much. I wouldn't like to say what she's like (Boy aged 15).

•

However, an older girl had a very favourable view of her mother although they no longer lived together:

She's really nice, she's great. She's always happy, she's always got an interest, always doing something, she's never ever bored and she's very economical too. She just does what she wants to do concerning finance, food and that. She never makes things seem worse than they ever are. She always makes a lot of things (Girl aged 16).

•

Other children often described their mothers as 'good' and 'nice' as well as some occasionally less favourable descriptions. There

was little difference between the attitudes of primary and secondary school children, although primary children's descriptions tended to be more concrete and succinct than those of the older children.

Access fathers

OF THE 146 CHILDREN (76 primary,70 secondary), who no longer lived with their fathers because of the separation or divorce of their parents, the majority (53 primary children, 47 secondary), continued to see their fathers on a regular basis.

Of the primary children no longer living with their 'real' fathers, 7 per cent still see them daily, 20 per cent once a week, 28 per cent fortnightly, 15 per cent once a month, 25 per cent less often than that, and three children do not see father at all. At secondary level one child sees father daily, 26 per cent see their fathers once a week, 18 per cent once a fortnight, 20 per cent once a month, 30 per cent less often, and two children never see their fathers.

Primary school children's views

ABOUT HALF THE PRIMARY children stayed with father when they saw him, a few children (16 per cent) just visited him, some (14 per cent) varied — sometimes visiting and sometimes staying with him, while in quite a number of cases (38 per cent) the children were visited by their fathers. A typical answer came from a young boy:

We go to Dad's place for the weekend and then we go back. We sleep at Dad's on Saturday — Saturday morning I go to Dad's. Sunday I go back to Mum's about six o'clock (Boy aged 8).

•

The children did many things when they were with fathers, but the most mentioned were going out (58 per cent), and playing together (41 per cent). Also mentioned were staying home, visiting friends, talking together, and working.

Sometimes we have games of Monopoly. We do farm work — rounding up cattle, feeding bulls and cows and calves and all that, and milking cows (Boy aged 9).

•

We go out, visit sights, help Dad with jobs (Boy aged 9).

•

More than half of these primary school children (64 per cent) wished they could spend more time with their fathers although others (35 per cent) were quite satisfied with the current arrangements. One girl has clearly sorted out in her own mind the sharing of her time between her parents:

Because I go to school and that, Mum has one day with me on the weekend and Dad has that too — so that's sort of fair. Because we live closer to the school here, Mum keeps me. Dad's got to get up early and go to work. I'd be real tired if I lived with him — he gets up at two in the morning (Girl aged 9).

•

Other children were not as contented, although they could see the reasoning behind the current arrangements. One young girl said:

I wish he spent more time, but he does spend a lot because he can't spend all his money on air fares for us to go up and back to Queensland (Girl aged 8).

•

Other children indicated that they themselves were changeable in their wishes.

Sometimes I'd like him to spend more time and other times I don't (Boy aged 9).

•

The question of the amount of time spent with the access parent is a complex one involving more than just the availability of the parent (and arrangements with the custodial parent); it also involves the child's attitudes to the parent, and the parent's interests and moods.

The children who wanted more time with father were asked what they would like to do with him if they had more time together. Most said they would like to go out with him (64 per cent), a number also wanted to play with him (42 per cent), and a variety of other activities were also mentioned. Sometimes the children had not thought what they wanted to do, they just wanted to be with their fathers. Some of the children's responses are as follows.

Nothing special — go to the basketball, maybe (Boy aged 8).

•

Not sure — I'd like to go swimming on hot days, or go to the park and play (Girl aged 9).

•

Help Dad with the little calves (Boy aged 9).

•

Don't know. Go ice skating and that (Girl aged 9).

•

Go camping a bit more — only been twice (Boy aged 9).

•

Nevertheless, more than half the children (60 per cent) no longer living with father still thought he was interested in the things they did. A small group (9 per cent) thought father was not very interested in what they did, some (16 per cent) thought he was not interested at all in what they did, and an equal number of children did not know if he was interested.

Secondary school children's views

SEVENTY SECONDARY school children no longer lived with father, but 47 of them

continued to see him on a regular basis. Those who no longer saw their fathers were not always happy about it. One teenage girl had this to say about her lack of contact with her father:

Saw him a couple of times and then he just didn't bother to come down and see me. He didn't make the effort to come (Girl aged 16).

•

A rather different feeling was expressed by a teenage boy:

Only heard from him a couple of months ago. My sister and I both wanted to see him, to see what he was like and that — different version from what my mother told me — but we couldn't let my mother down and that. But still, in a way I'd like to go see him. He rang up and talked to my sister but my sister said she might want to see him and had a talk on the phone. But I really didn't get the chance because I didn't want to let my Mum down (Boy aged 16).

•

Of the many children (44 per cent) who continued to see father or stay with him, a number (37 per cent) said he visited them, some (17 per cent) varied, sometimes visiting and sometimes staying with him, while a few (12 per cent) visited only. The pattern of joint activities at secondary level is somewhat different from that of the primary children, although going out together was still the major activity (62 per cent). More teenagers mentioned staying at home (26 per cent), talking together (21 per cent), working together (21 per cent), and fewer (14 per cent) indicated that they played with their fathers. The change in activities is most likely associated with the increasing maturity of children in this group. The following are some examples of what adolescents said they did with their fathers.

We're usually watching TV. We just talk about what's on telly (Girl aged 17).

•

We go out to dinner or the pictures sometimes. Go to see a play (Girl aged 17).

•

Play golf, go down to his beach house. We just talk about things (Boy aged 16).

•

We mainly talk, chat things over. I think he's fairly concerned about how we are, how we're getting along and things (Boy aged 15).

•

Usually we go and look round the shops; discuss how we feel about each other (Girl aged 15).

•

While more than half (57 per cent) of the secondary school children who had contact with their fathers were satisfied with the amount of time they spent with them, quite a large group (41 per cent) said they wished they could spend more time with their fathers. However, for children in this older age group, wanting or not wanting to spend more time with father is not quite the clear-cut issue it may at first appear to be. For example, one girl explained:

I don't really think he spends enough time with us but I don't really care if he doesn't as I don't know what to talk to him about when I do see him (Girl aged 16).

•

A boy said if he spent more time with his father that:

I would like to tell him off. He did nick off at exactly the wrong time — not at the divorce, but ten years before that. He shouldn't have nicked off then. He deserted the family (Boy aged 15).

•

"We're usually watching TV. We just talk about what's on telly."
Girl, aged 17

Other adolescents also expressed some ambivalence about spending more time with father, while others again wanted to be with him more and get to know him. The following is a selection of viewpoints.

When I was smaller it seemed to be extremely important to me how much time we spent. I think like every child that when parents divorce there is a difficult period when the father is very important and you're not getting enough time from him. But later on it seems to lose a lot of its importance and I didn't really care much (Boy aged 16).

•

I'm not really sure 'cos sometimes I'm not in the mood to see him. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable when I see him (Girl aged 15).

•

Don't know him all that well and don't know whether I want to. I remember all his bad moods and temper. Don't know him at all! (Girl aged 15).

•

Just stay at home and see what, sort of, his house is like more, and get to know him more because we don't really know each other well as far as father and daughter goes, although he's still my father. I see him six, seven, eight times a year (Girl aged 14).

•

I wish he'd spend a little more time because where he's living at the moment, he's with a lady and four kids and when we go down there, there's kind of all us together. I'd like to go on trips — just the three of us, Dad, my sister and me, camping. We've been on a camping trip before and I'd like to do that again (Girl aged 16).

■

Overall, the largest group of secondary school children (38 per cent) who wanted more time with their fathers wanted to be able to talk to them more, although many children (31 per cent) were interested in going out with them, and some (25 per cent) just wanted to be included in things with their fathers.

Many adolescents (59 per cent), whether they wanted more time with father or not, were satisfied that he was interested in the things they did. Nevertheless, some of these older children (16 per cent) felt their fathers were not at all interested, and a further group (23 per cent) felt their fathers were not very interested in what they did.

"... get to know him more because we don't really know each other as far as father and daughter goes ..."

Girl, aged 14

Children's descriptions of access fathers

PRIMARY SCHOOL children who no longer lived with their fathers continued on the whole, to have a positive picture of them although a few did not think well of them. One 9-year-old boy said his father was *'a grumpy one'*, and a young girl said:

He sits and thinks about himself all the time. That's about all. He always has — he doesn't seem to think of other people (Girl aged 9).

●

But most answers were more in keeping with the girl who described her 'real' father this way:

He's athletic, he's got white hair and he's got dentures. He's nice and kind. He's got blue eyes (Girl aged 8).

●

A few young children were ambivalent and could see both bad and good aspects of their fathers:

He's a human being. He's strong. He's nice and bad. When he doesn't drink he doesn't hit my mother, but when he does drink ... (Boy aged 9).

■

Overall, the secondary school children tended to have mixed feelings about their fathers, although some were quite positive in their views, and others quite negative. One girl expressed her affection succinctly, saying her real father was:

A funny person. A caring person. I love him (Girl aged 15).

●

Another girl said:

He's generous and kind and just likes to be with people. If you ask for money — if you think you need it — he'll often give it to you and if you want to see him or something — like if you want to see him at the shop he usually gives up time at the shop for me. He's just pleasant to you all the time unless you're doing something wrong. He's just kind (Girl aged 16).

■

A less favourable perspective was expressed by another teenager:

He is basically a male chauvinist. Every time my stepmother, the one he's married to now, asks him to do something around the house he says 'I'm not genetically coded for that' (Girl aged 16).

●

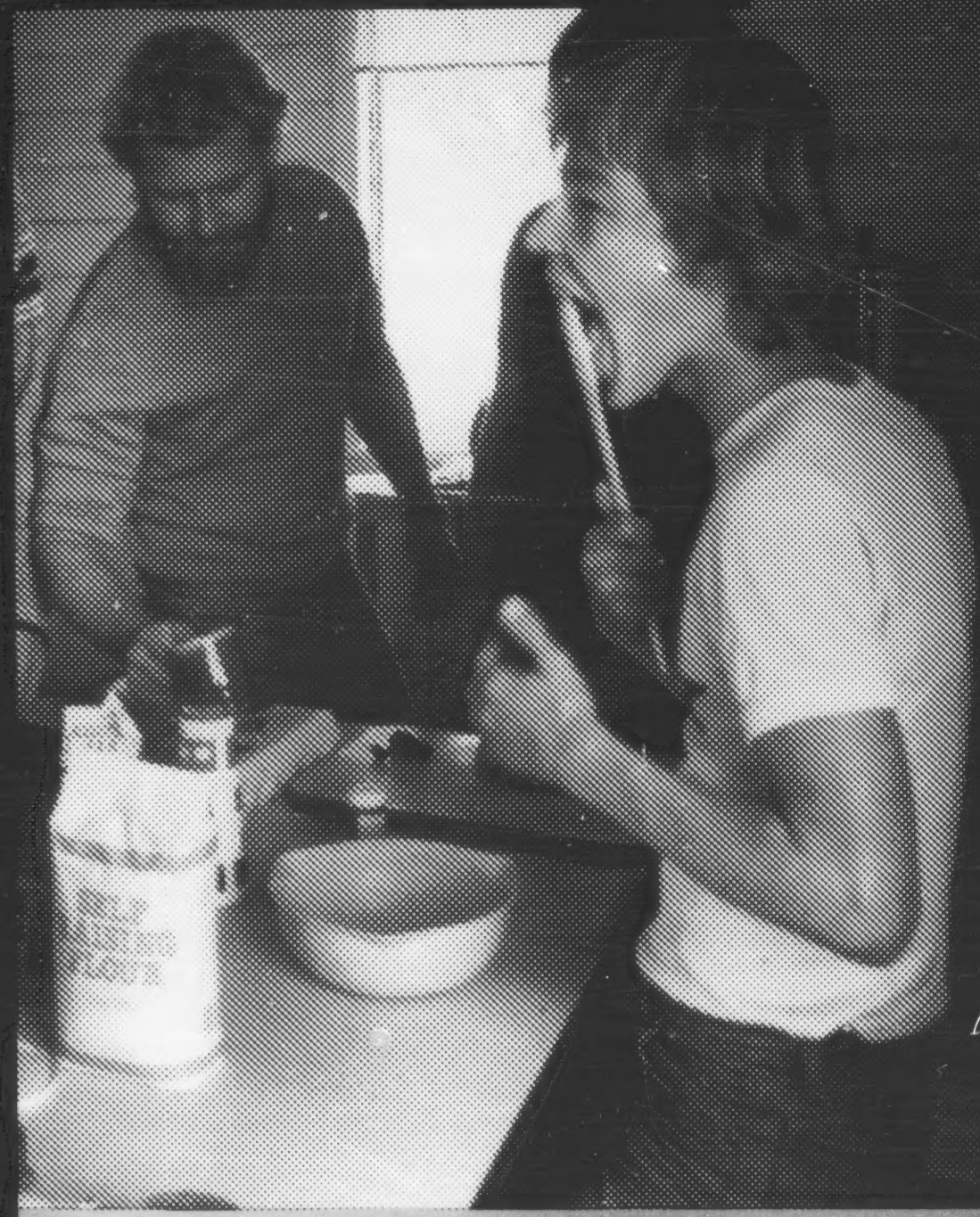
Many mentioned their 'real' fathers as having bad or quick tempers although otherwise being 'kind', 'nice' and 'fun to be with'. Some of these older children saw their fathers as being rather mixed up or changed in some way. As one girl said:

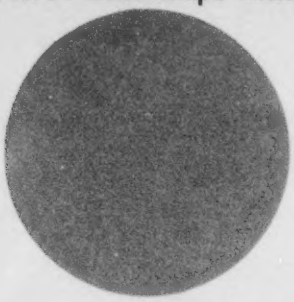
He used to be really caring but he seems to have hardened up a lot. That's what Mum's told us and I've seen it for myself as well. From what I can remember of him when I was little he was really nice and caring, but now he's gone all hard and very closed (Girl aged 15).

Children's relatio the family

36

nships within





ALTHOUGH PARENTS ARE OF great importance, other members of the household also have an influence on the growing child. We wanted to find out more about children's relationships with other household members as well as their relationships with parents. To do this we asked each child which person in the family he or she spent the most time with and what they did together. We also asked them if there was a person in the family they most liked to have talks with and what sort of things they talked about. In asking these questions we were trying to find out more about the child's pattern of companionship and communication within the family. Finally we asked the children in whom they would confide if something was really worrying them.

Companionship

A LARGE NUMBER OF BOTH primary (42 per cent) and secondary (44 per cent) school children said they spent most time with their mothers. Primary school children were more likely to spend time with brothers (25 per cent) or sisters (13 per cent) than with their fathers (9 per cent). Quite a number of secondary school children also said they spent most time with their brothers (17 per cent) or sisters (15 per cent). But a number of secondary children (15 per cent), also said they spent time with no single person in the household. Very few children at either age level said they spent most time with their fathers (8 per cent primary, 9 per cent secondary). The reason for the popularity of mothers may be because they are more readily available than fathers.

When we asked the children what they did when they were with the person they spent most time with, the greatest percentage of primary children (51 per cent) said they played some sort of games or sport; the greatest percentage of secondary school children (59 per cent) said they talked together. The second most mentioned activity for primary school children (20 per cent) was work, whereas for secondary school children it was recreation and leisure activities (32 per cent). Playing games or sport was third on the list for secondary children (19 per cent). Talk was the fourth most mentioned activity for primary school children (14 per cent), while secondary school children said working together (17 per cent). Some children at both levels said they watched television together or were just in the room together.

The following is a selection of children's replies to the questions about who they spent the most time with and what they did together.

My sister. We just go for walks and play dolls and go to the park and all those things (Girl aged 9).

•

Brother. Sometimes we ride together, play tennis together, or play with his plane (Girl aged 9).

•

Mum mainly. We make desserts for after tea and sometimes we make stews together for tea. We go shopping together because I always remember things and she doesn't (Girl aged 10).

•

Mum. We watch telly (Girl aged 9).

•

My brothers — we're just like mates instead of brothers (Boy aged 15).

•

Mum. She does what she does and I do what I do. We don't do things together, usually it just happens (Boy aged 15).

•

Mum. Either sitting at home talking. Or if I play sport on Saturday she might come out and watch. Sometimes we might go to a film (Boy aged 15).

"Mum and I go shopping together because I always remember things and she doesn't."
Girl, aged 10

Communication

MOST PRIMARY SCHOOL children (68 per cent) and even more secondary school children (77 per cent) said there was a person in their family with whom they most liked to have talks. For primary children it was mostly mothers who were mentioned (54 per cent); fathers were very much second choice (16 per cent). Some children said both their mothers and fathers and some said there was no one. Secondary school children also said mother (45 per cent) was the person they liked to talk with most, but the second choice was a sister (21 per cent) or a brother (16 per cent). Father was mentioned less (14 per cent). Father may be less popular than mother because he is less available, but from reading the interviews it appears that, overall, fathers have less understanding of the things children want to talk about. This particularly applies to adolescents who often want to talk about personal relationships and problems.

When we asked the children what they talked about with this particular person in the family,

the majority of primary children said school-related things (39 per cent), some said everything (15 per cent), and a great variety of other topics were mentioned. As might be expected because of their greater maturity, secondary children indicated that school and career (47 per cent), problems (36 per cent), and social relations were frequent topics of conversation. But quite a number of secondary children said they talked about everything (27 per cent). Some examples of the range of topics follows.

My Mum. We talk about the sky, we talk about nature — the colours we like (Girl aged 9).

•

Sister. Sometimes what we do at school, like excursions and things, and sometimes we talk after looking in magazines, like if she and I like boys and that (Girl aged 9).

•

Dad. Can't really say because every time we talk about different subjects, sports and so on (Boy aged 8).

•

Older sister. Friends, boyfriends, hassles at school and hassles at home, school. She often helps with study for exams and things like that (Girl aged 15).

•

Dad. Just about school and hobbies and things like that. There's plenty of things I'd like to talk to him about but that's usually about Mum, and I don't like to talk to him about it because I feel I'll offend him. We used to be in sailing together and we used to just sit and talk about things (Boy aged 16).

•

Mum. Just everything. Like, I come home from school and tell her what I did today or, if I go out, what happened when I went out. Just things like that — things that I do. She knows everything that I do and where I've been (Girl aged 16).

•

Mum. Not the actual things but how they affect me. Especially if I'm depressed or she's depressed we talk about it and see what we think and if we can give any advice (Girl aged 14).

Support with worries

FINALLY, WE WANTED TO know to whom children turned if something was really worrying them. This person did not necessarily have to be in the family nor did it have to be one person only. Children at primary school mostly said mother (81 per cent) or father (42 per cent). Secondary school children indicated they had a greater variety of supports, or were willing or able to use more diverse supports. However, mother (61 per cent) and father (16 per cent) were still high on the list. Sister (16 per cent) and friends (16 per cent) were often mentioned. At secondary level a few children said they would keep their worries to themselves (7 per cent); this was less likely with primary school children (2 per cent).

Family changes

AS INDICATED IN THE introduction to this report, families have changed in many ways this century. The Australian Institute of Family Studies wanted to learn more about changes which children have experienced themselves and how they felt about change. Furthermore, we wanted to know if the children would like to change their families in any way.

Changes children would like

THE MAJORITY OF PRIMARY school children (72 per cent) and more than half the secondary school children (54 per cent) said they would not change anything about their families even if they could. Children who would have liked to change something gave diverse replies. Some (7 per cent primary, 17 per cent secondary) would have liked to change patterns of behaviour and conflict, a few mentioned the economic situation, a few said housing, and a great variety of other things were mentioned.

I would change how we live. I would tell them to go and do what they want and be free and that. Because none of our family goes out a lot (Girl aged 9).

•

I'd stop them growling all the time — my grandfather. And I'd like to stop my brother wrecking my toys and my mother to stop growling too (Girl aged 9).

•

I'd probably like it to be a bit easier on Mum — like financially. But I think we're pretty right now (Girl aged 15).

•

Yes. My brother to be younger. He shows off being older and he bashes me up and things. I would like him to be two because I'm nine and then he'd be younger than me and I could boss him around (Boy aged 9).

"... I'd like to stop my brother wrecking my toys and my mother to stop growling too." Girl, aged 9

Changes which have occurred in the family

WE ALSO ASKED THE children if there had been any times when they thought their families had changed. As might be expected, more secondary (68 per cent) school children than primary (43 per cent) said their families had changed in some way. The reasons given for change were varied but the most commonly cited reason at both age levels was the divorce and separation of their parents (28 per cent primary, 28 per cent secondary). Also mentioned were siblings leaving home, births and deaths, new step-parents, and mother starting work. More primary children (45 per cent) than secondary (34 per cent) saw the change in a negative light. Some children saw the change as positive (21 per cent primary, 32 per cent secondary) and some saw it as a mixed blessing. The following is a selection of what children at both age levels said about changes in the family.

When we came up here to the country to live everything changed. Like, me and my brother used to have friends to stay overnight or week days. Now that can't happen 'cause people here do lots of things in the week anyway. Dad doesn't have as much to do here as in Melbourne. Now he's spending more time with my brother and me (Boy aged 8, intact family).

•

Since my Dad left it's been a big change. He used to argue with my Nanna a lot, argue with Mum, argue with everyone (Girl aged 9, mother only).

•

When we got our house it changed a lot because on the same day we got the chooks (Girl aged 8, intact family).

•

Having a new parent. It's just different. Like when you get a new brother. It just changes the family. The family changes to the person (Boy aged 16, stepfamily).

•

We had to get used to having more brothers and a new Dad. Mum had to adapt — have more kids, so did Dad. We had to learn to be a family together (Girl aged 16, stepfamily).

•

Having to get used to all the shifting all the time. We can only rent a place because Mum's on a pension and we have to uproot the family every time we have to get out of the house. We're sick of leaving all the time so the family gets a bit edgy (Girl aged 16, mother only).

•

The family has changed a lot since my brothers have been working. They've made more friends and go out all the time. They don't stay home as often and they don't include Mum and us if they go out at weekends (Girl aged 16, intact family).

•

We're now a split family. We have two groups of people, two sets of friends. It's just been split in half (Boy aged 15, father only).

•

We learned to stick up for ourselves more and there's no one to bully us around so we can be us. We got a lot closer — I'm a lot closer to my sister even though we fight all the time. Mum's changed a lot too — she's had a lot more problems and it's really

hard for her. That's the only thing I miss about Dad — that Mum is sort of deteriorating. She works the whole time and she's always tired and that. It's just not fair (Girl aged 16, mother only).

•

Before Mum had this job she was always home when I got home from school and all the dishes were done. But now when I get home from school and I have to do all the dishes and start getting the tea ready and feed all the animals (Girl aged 16, intact family).

•

Mother began working. I think it's good. You've got to give your mother room to stretch her legs. You can't just expect her to be there to cook meals etc. That's what she's doing now — developing her personality more (Girl aged 16, intact family).

The effect on children of moving house

TO FURTHER TAP MAJOR changes in the lives of children and families we asked how often they had shifted house. Shifting often means loss of friends and a change of school for children. For some children this may be an exciting prospect, for others it is a traumatic time. Unexpectedly, more secondary school children (57 per cent) than primary (38 per cent) had not shifted house at all in their lives. More primary school children (20 per cent) than secondary (10 per cent) had moved between three and five times. At both age levels it was more often the children in intact, two-parent families who had not moved at all or moved least. Children in one-parent families or stepfamilies had moved most.

Of the **primary** children who had moved, more felt it was a negative experience (46 per cent) than a positive one (31 per cent), while others again did not have clear feelings about shifting. One young girl who had experienced moving several times expressed one of the biggest associated fears:

I felt nervous. We hate going to different schools because when we get there we feel scared (Girl aged 9).

•

Another girl also disliked shifting, but for different reasons:

I felt awful, because I really like my old room. It was a modern house — and it had a hill there (Girl aged 9).

•

However, another child found that moving into a rented house brought an improvement in circumstances:

I felt better, because in the flats you're not allowed to do certain things. You're not allowed to have pets, you're not allowed to have birds. I wanted a dog or a cat, but you wouldn't be allowed to have them. And no swings (Girl aged 9).

•

Slightly more of the **secondary** school children (38 per cent) felt shifting house was a positive experience rather than a negative one (31 per cent). A teenage boy was very glad to move:

I was glad to get out because I had a lot of problems there. Had to get out quick. I was on the way down. Used to get beaten up. Gangbash. Big kids used to stand over me. Also, flats weren't very good (Boy aged 15).

•

A girl who lived with her father felt bad about moving:

I hated it. I'd lived in that house all my life and it had a lot of memories for me. It was very much like my Mum. It was sort of like leaving a big memory behind. I don't like our new house. Our old house was a little old one, really cute and had character. This one is brick veneer — kitch and crap (Girl aged 15).

•

Other adolescents were ambivalent about the experience or didn't really care either way:

I was quite pleased because I was getting a room of my own. I didn't like leaving some of the things behind — but on average I enjoyed the change (Boy aged 16).

•

Another boy whose parents had divorced and who had shifted very recently said:

I didn't want to shift, actually. From what I can remember we used to shift all the time when I was little as Dad's business went along. We'd been in the area for about seven years — we were really great friends with the neighbours (Boy aged 15).

"... We hate going to different schools because when we get there we feel scared."
Girl, aged 9

How families

are organised

Children helping around the house

IN PAST CENTURIES IN Western society, and in some underdeveloped societies even now, children have been obliged to work from an early age. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century in the Industrial Revolution period children of the poor worked long hours for low wages in the factories and mines. It was not until 1870 that the British Parliament passed an Education Act which encompassed the principle that every child under the age of 10 should attend school full-time (Best, 1973).

As recently as 1975 one American researcher was arguing that children's competencies are currently underestimated and that they are under-employed (Boocock, 1975). This researcher was not arguing for a return to exploitative child labour, but for a greater utilisation of children's capacities for their own good, and the good of society. Childhood in modern affluent societies is frequently regarded as a period of training for adult responsibilities and parents often fear the effect of too much 'pressure' on children. They do not like to ask children to do much work, whereas those in less advanced countries have no such fears (Goodman, 1973). Nowadays, children's work is mostly confined to helping in the home, with the exception of some older children who may have part-time jobs to earn their own pocket money.

Almost all the children interviewed said their parents expected them to help out around the house. In each age group, about half said they had regular set jobs to do, while the other half said they helped when asked. However, it appears that the choice of jobs was rarely left to the children themselves. In about 90 per cent of all families decisions about children's jobs were made by the parents (more often by mothers than by fathers).

Expectations about helping around the house, even for younger children, were taken seriously by most parents. Seventy per cent of primary school children and 60 per cent of secondary school children said that if their chores were not completed they usually got into trouble.

> "... Because if you messed up the house you've got to clean it up yourself. It's not your Mum's and Dad's mess ..."
>
> Girl, aged 9

In a recent study, the most common reason American parents give for children's work in the family was associated with developing character and responsibility in the child (White and Brinkerhoff, 1981). Few parents expressed the need for children's help as a reason. However, the proportion of parents giving character development and responsibility as a reason declines with the increasing age of the child. It was also found that working mothers and single parents were more likely than other parents to say that they needed the child's help.

The Institute's study indicates that children, on the other hand, believed the major reason they worked around the home was that parents *needed* help (60 per cent primary, 61 per cent secondary). In particular, children who lived with single parents thought they were needed to help in the home. Some children considered that work was part of the development of character, learning and responsibility, but it was the older children who were more likely to think this than the younger children (14 per cent primary, 35 per cent secondary). When we asked why children should help around the house, **primary** school children replied:

Because parents can't do it all themselves. If it's a hard job then they need help (Boy aged 9).

•

If children don't help, Mum and Dad could get sick or get a sore back from bending down and all that (Girl aged 9).

•

If the house was in a mess your Mum and your Dad couldn't clean it all by themselves. Because if you messed up the house you've got to clean it up yourself. It's not your Mum's and Dad's mess it's yours. You should do it (Girl aged 9).

•

Many **secondary** school students also stated that children should help around the house simply because parents needed assistance. However, many of these older children also recognised a variety of other reasons for helping. The responses of several teenagers included below give an indication of the range of views expressed.

If you get pocket money you need to be able to work for it to learn that you don't just get everything (Boy aged 15).

•

So all the work's not put onto your parents. The home seems to end up a lot nicer and the family more together (Girl aged 15).

•

You feel more a part of the family. You feel as if you've got more independence and not completely dependent. It makes it easier for the other people in the house (Girl aged 15).

•

It teaches kids to work properly and to know what is expected of them when they are working with other people. Discipline — not to be lazy or anything (Boy aged 16).

•

They've got to learn to do things for when they leave home themselves. They shouldn't leave everything to their parents. In my case my parents both work so I should let my parents have a rest. Also, its sometimes hard for your parents to do all the things at home. Like Mum used to say to me, I haven't got eight legs (Girl aged 16).

The allocation of household tasks

ALL CHILDREN WERE ASKED who *usually* did certain tasks around the house. Sometimes it was hard for them to make the decision because more than one person usually did particular jobs. For this reason we allowed children to indicate two people where necessary. In addition, we made it possible for children to indicate when everybody joined in and when people took it in turns.

Children helped around the house in a variety of ways. Many primary children (60 per cent) and even more secondary children (83 per cent) said they usually picked up their belongings and tidied their own rooms, although sometimes their mothers tidied up for them, particularly for the younger children. Mothers more often cleaned the room for primary children (56 per cent), but secondary students (74 per cent) said they most often cleaned their own rooms.

Most children at both levels (62 per cent primary, 82 per cent secondary) usually made their own beds. However, on those occasions when they did not, mothers usually did this task. Mothers were more likely than children to change the sheets (83 per cent primary, 52 per cent secondary). Mothers were also most likely to make the lunch (80 per cent primary, 53 per cent secondary), but on some occasions children at both levels made lunch, with children in stepfamilies and one-parent families being more likely to do so than children in two-parent families.

Almost half the younger children (48 per cent) and fewer older children (28 per cent) set and cleared the table. Mother continued to be the family member who usually washed and dried the dishes or put them in the dishwasher (49 per cent primary, 41 per cent secondary), although the children (11 per cent primary, 11 per cent secondary) helped regularly as did a significant number of fathers.

At both age levels mothers usually washed the clothes (93 per cent primary, 89 per cent secondary). Mothers also usually ironed the clothes (94 per cent primary, 76 per cent secondary) although older children sometimes reported that they did the ironing.

At both levels (95 per cent primary, 87 per cent secondary) children said that cooking was largely the task of mothers, although a few fathers and some children at secondary level were involved. There was a very slight trend for mothers in one-parent families to do less cooking and the children more. Mothers also usually swept or vacuumed the floor (77 per cent primary, 75 per cent secondary). Some children said they usually did these things but once again it was more often the children in one-parent families or stepfamilies than children in two-parent families. The shopping was also usually done by mothers (87 per cent primary, 90 per cent secondary) although fathers sometimes shopped.

It appears that running errands is a task that is rarely done these days — perhaps because suburban corner shops have been taken over by supermarkets, and because most parents have cars.

Mother was the person who usually watered indoor plants (64 per cent primary, 72 per cent secondary). Although she was also sometimes cited as the person most likely to feed the pets (19 per cent primary, 28 per cent secondary), this responsibility was shared among other family members at both age levels with the children frequently having this responsibility (35 per cent primary, 36 per cent secondary).

Father (51 per cent) was the most usual person to mow the lawn in the families of the younger children, while at the older age level it was usually the child (39 per cent) or the father (39 per cent). At both levels the oldest boy in the family and some mothers sometimes did the lawns.

Work in the garden or yard was more often done by mothers (43 per cent primary, 46 per cent secondary), although fathers also quite often worked in the garden or yard (38 per cent primary, 38 per cent secondary); quite a number of the children also did this on a regular basis. Fathers usually fixed things around the house and yard (65 per cent primary, 62 per cent secondary). In one-parent households with younger children it was more often mother who fixed things, but at secondary level the child or an older brother did the fixing.

At primary level, father (34 per cent) was the person who most often washed the car, but at secondary level the child most often was the person; some mothers and other family members also did this chore.

Looking after the younger children was a task that was undertaken by all family members, rather than by a set person, although mother was sometimes mentioned as the most usual person to do this task (38 per cent primary, 27 per cent secondary).

When we asked who smoothed over disagreements in the family, mother was the most usual person at both levels (54 per cent primary, 43 per cent secondary), but some fathers had this role (32 per cent primary, 24 per cent secondary).

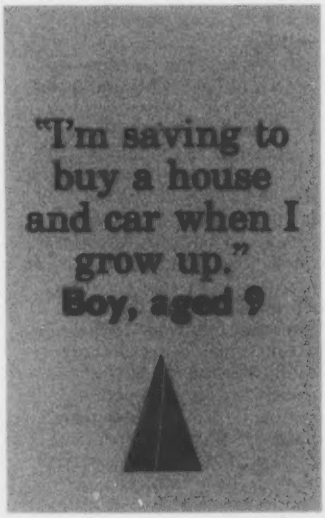
Half the 386 mothers in the sample were in paid employment outside the home, although some worked part-time only. Nevertheless, it appeared that mothers have the greatest responsibility for household chores. The division of labour in the household was far from equally shared between parents, or between parents and children. Most mothers were in the traditional role of housewife and those who worked outside the home had a very heavy workload.

Children appeared more likely than fathers to take some responsibility and to help with many routine tasks. However, it was also apparent that mothers often shared the responsibility for tasks with the children. It must be remembered that in the one-parent families where the children lived with mother only, father was not available to help with tasks and this skews our results somewhat.

Pocket money

ALTHOUGH POCKET MONEY (or an allowance) has become an accepted way of allocating money for children's use in many families, it is by no means universal. Furthermore, the reasons for giving pocket money to children vary. Some children may be given a certain amount of money without fail, some receive it only if they carry out certain required tasks, and others may receive pocket money for some other reason, such as good behaviour. Some parents prefer to give money as required, so their children do not get pocket money.

One advantage of regular pocket money is that it can be used to teach children responsibility with money — even quite young children can gain some sense of independence by having control of a small amount of money. They can make their own decisions about spending or saving, although parents may still influence them. Children who do not receive regular pocket money are more dependent on parents in this regard as parents can refuse to give the money when they do not agree with the child's need; also, it is hard for the child to have any privacy in his or her spending (for example, when buying presents).



We wanted to find out about the sorts of arrangements families have to provide children with money and other ways children may have to earn money; we also wanted to know more about the things children do with their money.

The majority of children said they received regular pocket money from their parents. Overall, 69 per cent of primary school children and 58 per cent of secondary school children received money regularly. Although slightly fewer secondary school children than primary school children received an allowance, those who did received considerably more: the average amount received by primary school children was $1 per week compared with $5 per week for secondary school children. (In both age groups there was no difference between boys and girls in the number receiving regular pocket money or in the amount of money received each week.)

One reason why the secondary school children we interviewed were less likely to receive regular pocket money is because many had their own sources of income from jobs. Half of the secondary school children in our sample had jobs, with 31 per cent having regular part-time jobs (such as working in a shop) and 19 per cent having occasional casual jobs (such as mowing lawns). The amount of money earned by these 15 and 16-year-olds ranged from only a couple of dollars a week to over $100 per week, with the average being $15.

Of course, it should be kept in mind that the interviews were conducted in 1982 and early 1983, and the cost of living has continued to increase since then. So it is likely that the actual amounts given to children by parents and employers are somewhat higher now. In addition, these figures underestimate the amount of money children have to spend each week, because most children (85 per cent at both age levels) reported that they frequently received extra money from their parents to pay for everyday items such as clothes, lunches, outings, and fares.

We also asked children what they spent their money on. Primary school boys and girls said that they were most likely to spend their money on food, games,

toys, and presents for other people. However, the most common response from these children (60 per cent) was that they saved their money. Many said that they were saving for an especially expensive toy, such as a bicycle. Others, however, had more long-range plans:

I'm saving to buy a house and car when I grow up (Boy aged 9).

•

For when I'm older — just in case (Girl aged 9).

■

Secondary school students said that they were most likely to spend their money on 'going out'. Both boys and girls also reported frequently buying food, clothes, records, and presents with their money. However, girls appeared to be more fashion-conscious than boys, since they were about three times more likely to spend their money on clothes. In addition, high proportions of both sexes (58 per cent) said that they were saving some of their money as well. Many said that they were saving for a car or a motor-bike, items which appeared to be especially desirable to this age group.

Family rules: who makes the decisions?

TRADITIONALLY, THE mother has been seen as having the main responsibility for everyday child care and family organisation, while the father has been seen as the breadwinner and disciplinarian.

We asked children to tell us which members of the family made decisions about four different aspects of their lives: their bedtimes, choice of TV programs, going out, and buying new clothes. Among both the primary and secondary children, the mother appeared to be the parent most likely to make decisions in these areas.

At **primary** school level the mother made decisions about their children's bedtimes in 64 per cent of families compared with the father in 15 per cent of families and the mother and father together in 14 per cent. Decisions about TV programs were made mainly by the mother in 44 per cent of families, mainly by the father in 22 per cent of families and by the mother and father together in 11 per cent of families. Decisions about children going out were made mainly by the mother in 53 per cent of families, mainly by the father in 18 per cent of families, and by both parents together in 24 per cent of families. Decisions about buying clothes were made mainly by the mother in 80 per cent of families, mainly by the father in 2 per cent of families and by both parents together in 7 per cent of families. Thus, mothers appeared to be more involved than fathers in day-to-day decision making about children.

At **secondary** level, children were much more likely to make their own decisions. This is in keeping with their needs and capacities for greater autonomy and independence. In just over half the families secondary school children reported that they usually made their own decisions about bedtime and buying clothes. In about one third of the families, children reported making their own decisions about TV programs. However, few of these children (15 per cent) said that they made their own decisions about going out, an area in which parents like to keep control longer. Going out is a contentious issue for many adolescents and their parents. As with the primary school children, mothers were reported to be more likely than fathers to be involved in making decisions about their children going out.

Children were also asked what happened to them if they were disobedient. Frequent punishments mentioned by **primary** school children were being hit (56 per cent), being yelled at (26 per cent), and getting sent to their rooms (35 per cent). Forms of punishment which were *not* mentioned very often included not being allowed to see friends, being told they were not loved, not being allowed to see television, and not receiving any pocket money. Also, very few of these children reported that their parents discussed their disobedient behaviour with them (5 per cent).

Secondary school children also reported that they were frequently yelled at by parents (48 per cent). However, they rarely reported being hit (7 per cent) or being sent to their rooms (5 per cent). Instead, a common consequence of disobedience was a discussion of the incident with a parent (20 per cent). It appears, therefore, that while the parents of younger children attempt to change their behaviour through physical punishment, the parents of older children are more likely to try reason. This may also be related to the fact that the older children are just too big to punish physically.

It is interesting to note that punishment was more likely to be given by either the mother alone or by both the mother and father together, rather than by the father alone. In fact, in very few households was the father the most likely person to punish the child for disobedience. This finding suggests that the traditional view of the father as being the main disciplinarian in the household may not be true, at least in Victoria at the present time.

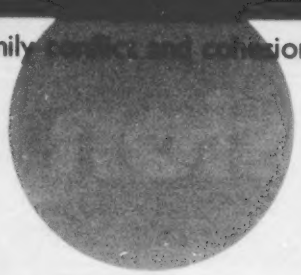
Overall, there was little difference between family types in regards to forms of punishment and frequency, but obviously in one-parent families the parent with whom the child is living usually metes out the punishment.

Family conflict an

d family cohesion

CONFLICT IS A NORMAL AND important aspect of family processes and in many families can even assist in sorting out relationships, 'clearing the air' and drawing individual boundaries. Conflict may occur as children become accustomed to fighting for their rights and coping with the frustration of not always getting their own way. In some families, however, conflict gets out of hand and becomes an excessive and pervasive part of family life — usually with destructive effects. Excessive family conflict frequently centres on the marital relationship but it may also have negative results for the children (Raschke and Raschke, 1979; Rutter, 1979; Ellison, 1983; Ochiltree and Amato, 1983).

As separation and divorce is so common these days and is usually preceded by conflict, the Australian Institute of Family Studies wanted to examine more closely family conflict as perceived by children. Further questions were asked about possible sources of conflict in the family. We also wished to determine to what extent children in two-parent families, including stepfamilies, fear that their parents may separate. Finally, we wanted to know more about the times when children feel a sense of family cohesion — when it feels really good to be together as a family.



Children's views of their parents' relationships

WE ASKED THE CHILDREN how they thought their parents got on together. Not all children answered this question as it was inappropriate for those living with a single parent. Of the primary school children who answered, most thought their parents got on very well (49 per cent) or fairly well (43 per cent). Their answers were short and to the point, such as 'good' or 'they get on very well' or 'all right'. Equally, most secondary school students thought their parents got on very well (48 per cent) or fairly well (43 per cent). Their answers were no more elaborate than those of the primary children.

A few primary school children (5 per cent) and some secondary school children (10 per cent) thought their parents did not get on very well, or got on badly. These children tended to give more elaborate explanatory answers as did those whose parents got on fairly well with just occasional arguments. The following examples give some idea of children's views on their parents' relationships.

They get on all right, but every now and then, they'll have a big argument. They're sort of growing apart. Like they don't go out so much any more. (Boy aged 15).

•

When I'm not around they get along fine but when I'm around they get jealous of each other. Because I'm the only kid, they always want my attention (Girl aged 15).

•

There are always arguments — especially about little [stepbrother]. [Stepfather] tries to stick up for him because it's his son and Mum will argue about something he does wrong. [Stepfather] will protect him a bit (Boy aged 15).

•

Say if Dad went to the pub to get a drink of wine and he had too much wine after work and then he came home, then he and Mum don't get on very well. Dad doesn't always really drink. Lately he has, so they haven't been getting on too well and he's sort of been trying to pick fights. That's what Mum says, but sometimes I sort of disagree with Mum. Sometimes I think she's sort of blaming arguments on Dad (Girl aged 9).

•

They just tolerate each other I think (Girl aged 16).

•

Not really very well. They argue a lot and don't spend much time with each other (Boy aged 15).

•

They get on all right except when Dad comes home cranky and goes off his block sometimes. That's when he goes to the football and goes to the pub and drinks a lot of beer and then comes home (Boy aged 9).

•

Usually good, but if Dad's had a few beers that's when Mum gets very edgy because she doesn't like the drink. He's usually in a happy mood after drinking. I don't think he realises Mum gets upset really bad. When Mum's upset I get upset (Girl aged 15).

•

To get some further idea of the parents' relationships we asked the children how often their parents got angry or disagreed. This was not implying that all arguments and disagreements are bad because as indicated earlier most people get angry and disagree sometimes. The greatest proportion of primary children said their parents hardly ever argued or disagreed (46 per cent) or only sometimes (31 per cent). There was a similar pattern for secondary children with most saying their parents hardly ever (41 per cent) or sometimes (33 per cent) got angry and disagreed with one another. A few primary children (9 per cent) and secondary children (6 per cent) said their parents never got angry or disagreed with one another. However, some children at both levels (8 per cent primary, 21 per cent secondary) said their parents argued and disagreed often or all the time. The following are examples of the variation in children's replies.

They don't fight at all — they just have disagreements and poke fun at each other because Mum does things which are not the most sensible things on earth (Boy aged 15).

•

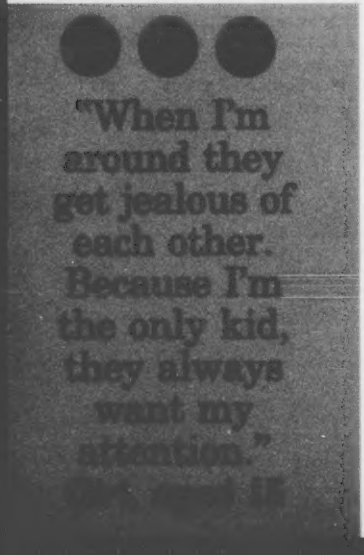
When Dad doesn't do something — and Mum does it. And then one changes their mind and they start (Boy aged 9).

•

Quite a bit — squabbling over who's forgotten to write something in the cheque book or who's mislaid something (Boy aged 16).

•

When my sister comes to stay with my Dad every second weekend. My stepmother is a bit



jealous of her because she's always with my Dad. Then she [stepmother] gets the shits and goes in her room and pretends nothing's the matter and then walks back in to get a smoke without saying anything. Then Dad notices and goes in there and she starts crying and he says, 'Don't worry about it' (Boy aged 15).

•

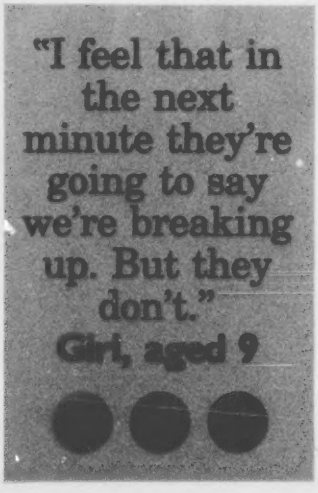
Sometimes when Dad comes back from the pub, Mum's real angry. And when Dad's been out all day, Mum's real angry (Girl aged 8).

How children feel when their parents argue or fight

WE ASKED HOW THE children felt when their parents argued or fought. The greatest number of children said they felt sad or upset, but more primary children (65 per cent) felt this way than secondary (31 per cent). Quite a number at both levels said it worried them when their parents argued.

Nearly each day they do. I feel awful. Feel like I want to stop it but I don't because they could go mad at me (Girl aged 9).

•



I feel that in the next minute they're going to say we're breaking up. But they don't (Girl aged 9).

•

I don't like it. I guess it's sort of upsetting a bit because they haven't been doing it all the time. They've only just sort of started nagging at each other and I wish they'd stop. Talk it over and just stop it (Girl aged 16).

•

A boy living with his mother in a stepfamily said:

I feel depressed, upset because of what happened with my Mum splitting up. It brings back old memories (Boy aged 16).

•

I feel bored, sick to death of it. Feel like leaving (Girl aged 16).

•

Some children were less affected by parental arguments and did not take them seriously. Quite a number at both levels said they did not care (13 per cent); some said it was normal to argue (2 per cent primary, 15 per cent secondary); and some said they felt angry (10 per cent primary, 13 per cent secondary) when their parents argued.

I just tell them to shut up. It doesn't worry me because it's only over a little thing probably — if Dad doesn't hear her and she has to repeat it again (Girl aged 16).

•

It doesn't really worry me because I know they'll always make up afterwards (Boy aged 15).

•

Sometimes I feel a bit unhappy — wish they wouldn't do it. But sometimes I don't really mind (Girl aged 9).

•

I feel angry. They never have a big fight. Just little arguments (Girl aged 15).

•

All right. It's usually me they fight over. Mum will say I shouldn't be able to do this and Dad will say no I should. That sort of thing. I enjoy it (Boy aged 16).

•

I feel like ignoring them — it's boring (Boy aged 10).

•

It's nothing to do with me — I just go into the lounge room and read my books or something (Boy aged 8).

Children's fears of possible parental separation

WITH THE INCREASE IN divorce and separation in the last decade many children have experienced the separation of their parents; children living with both their parents often have friends or classmates who have been through this experience. Some children indicated that one of their fears when parents argued was that they might separate or divorce. To get a more accurate picture of the extent of this fear we asked all children living with both parents or in stepfamilies if they were ever frightened that their parents may separate. This question was asked as part of a group of questions regarding child fears such as fear of spiders, fear of nuclear war among other things.

More than half the children at both age levels said they were not frightened that their parents might separate (52 per cent primary, 68 per cent secondary). More younger children (48 per cent) than adolescents (32 per cent) said yes they were frightened that their parents may separate. This may be because younger children are more dependent on their parents than are adolescents of 15 or 16 who generally spend less time with parents and move with peers and who are well on the way to becoming independent.

Power relationships between parent and child

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS inevitably change to some extent as the child moves into adolescence, and it is during adolescence that there are more likely to be clashes with parents as the adolescent strives for autonomy. Younger children are more dependent on parents and usually easier to manage because of their eagerness to please, even when they have done something wrong.

One way of looking at the changes in family relationships which occur at adolescence is in terms of available resources and power. At adolescence there are major changes in the distribution of resources and hence power. The adolescent suddenly grows tall, sometimes taller than the parents, and no longer is it easy, or in some cases even possible, to use physical means of discipline. The child develops the capacity to reflect and think in more abstract ways and some adolescents achieve an educational level which surpasses that of their parents. Outside the home, peer groups and friends provide personal resources for the adolescent and part-time jobs provide an economic resource which frees them from total economic dependence on parents (Rutter, 1979). Money earned provides for entertainment, clothes and other commodities which the parents may not be able to afford or may not approve (Collins, 1975).

At this stage the parent has lost many of the resources for power and control which existed when the child was younger. Unfortunately, some parents try to retain the same control they had earlier and inevitably conflict occurs. Some conflict cannot be avoided but it is best if adolescents are given responsibility for their lives gradually. The ultimate aim of parenting is for children to become independent adults capable of managing their own lives, but this is sometimes forgotten (Edgar, 1980; Kagan, 1977). Parenting during adolescence is far from easy as there are no hard and fast rules to follow. Children can be at their most rebellious when they are least independent and differentiated from their parents.

Parent-child conflict

TO GAIN SOME FURTHER insight into the parent-child relationship and any associated conflicts we asked the children what makes their parents angry with them, and what made them angry with their parents. As might be expected, disobedience or naughtiness was most likely to make parents angry with the children (66 per cent primary, 54 per cent secondary). Fighting with brothers and sisters made parents of younger children angry (28 per cent) more often than it did parents of older children (11 per cent). Not helping made parents of the older children (19 per cent) angry more often than parents of the younger ones (7 per cent). Backchat (9 per cent) and being silly (5 per cent) made parents of some children at both levels angry. A variety of other things were also mentioned (24 per cent) as making parents angry with their children. The following give some indication of the range of replies.

When I say 'so'. She says something and I say, 'so?' She hates that (Girl aged 17).

•

If I give cheek to her. If I was really cheeky to her or if I started an argument in the family. It's usually stuff like that (Girl aged 16).

•

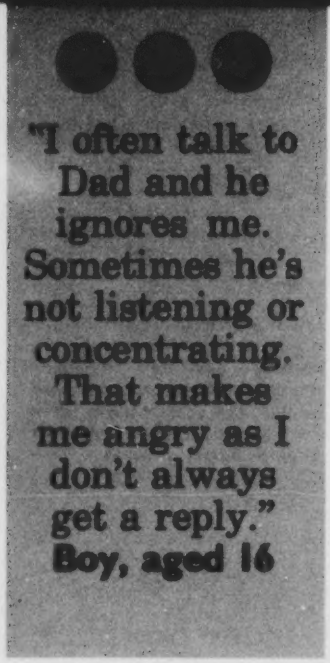
If I'm having a fight with my sister and I hit her or something Mum gets angry then. If Dad wants to watch something and I go and turn the TV over or something. Just general things like that. Or if they go to a parent-teacher night and find out I haven't been working (Boy aged 15).

•

If she asks us to do something, she depends on us to do it. When she's working she doesn't get home until about 5 o'clock and we're home at 4 o'clock. So if she's asked us to do something it usually has to be done by the time she gets home so she doesn't have to nag us. If we don't do it then that makes her pretty cross (Boy aged 16).

•

The largest group of primary school children (21 per cent) claimed that nothing made them angry (or cross) with their parents while only a small group (5 per cent) of secondary students felt this way. The largest group of secondary students (33 per cent) felt angry when they thought their parents were unreasonable,


"I often talk to Dad and he ignores me. Sometimes he's not listening or concentrating. That makes me angry as I don't always get a reply."
Boy, aged 16

whereas fewer primary children (15 per cent) indicated this. One teenager said she felt angry with parents:

When they get angry with me when I didn't do anything. Or when they're being real horrid, when they're in a bad mood and when they take it out on me (Girl aged 15).

■

Not being allowed out was a source of friction between adolescents and their parents, and almost a quarter (24 per cent) said this made them angry with their parents. Some primary children (13 per cent) also felt this. One teenager put it this way:

I get angry if she doesn't let me go out somewhere. Like, last summer it was hot and she didn't let me go to the beach. She's just too over-protective (Girl aged 16).

●

It is often as the adolescent strives for autonomy and independence, while the parent continues to feel responsible and the need to retain control, that there are clashes between the two. As one boy put it:

They're clamping down on me [regarding school work], they're cutting down my social activities too much, and I don't reckon it's right and it gets me cut up sometimes (Boy aged 16).

●

Parental lack of understanding also made adolescents (18 per cent) angry, but only a very few young children (4 per cent) gave this as a reason for feeling angry with parents.The following are several examples of what children see as lack of understanding on the part of parents.

When they ignore you. I often talk to Dad and he ignores me. Sometimes he's not listening or concentrating. That makes me angry as I don't always get a reply (Boy aged 16).

■

When they laugh at me (Girl aged 8).

■

Sometimes when they don't believe what you've said (Girl aged 16).

■

If for some reason they don't understand what I'm trying to say. Like, I might have a problem that's not easy to talk about and I try to do the best I can. But they just won't — can't understand it and I get really mad and frustrated (Girl aged 16).

■

When they fight in front of my friends, because that gets really embarrassing. When they fight in front of my little brothers, because I'm over-protective. When they're just being pompous and say, 'I'm right because I'm a parent' (Girl aged 16).

■

If they hit me and yell at me or treat me like a little kid. I don't like it (Girl aged 16).

●

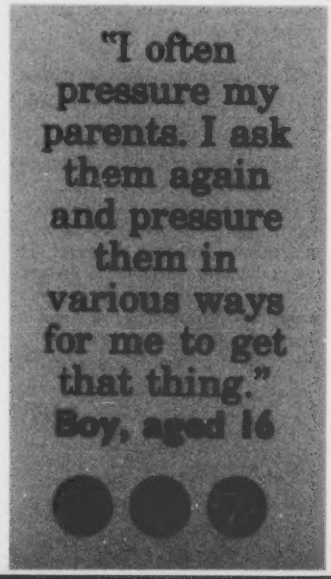
Parents fighting, being treated like a baby, or parents who are too strict were all mentioned as making children angry (or cross) with their parents. Inevitably parents must do things which make children angry at times and the circumstances will vary with the age of the child.

How children react to parent control

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ways in which children try to manipulate or influence parents in order to get their own way, we asked all children what they did if there was something they really wanted to *have* and their parents would not allow them to have it. Just over half (53 per cent) the secondary students said they would accept the situation or do nothing whereas only about a third of primary school children (35 per cent) said this. Some children gave more than one response depending on the circumstance of the parent's refusal. More secondary students (41 per cent) than primary (34 per cent) said they would argue, complain, get angry or sulk. About equal numbers of primary children (26 per cent) and secondary (28 per cent) said they would take some positive action, such as saving for whatever it was themselves, asking for it as a birthday or Christmas present or discussing it with their parents.

I just think I'm not allowed to have it, so I don't have it, and I ask Father Christmas if I can have it (Girl aged 9).

■



Get mad. Chuck all me pillows around (Boy aged 9).

•

Just leave it at that (Girl aged 9).

•

If Mum says no you're not going to have it, I have to let it go and just be quiet (Girl aged 9).

•

I try and accept that. I often pressure my parents. I ask them again and pressure them in various ways for me to get that thing (Boy aged 16).

•

Think I've gone past that stage. We can't afford anything so I'm not really all that fussy about what I have and what I don't have (Boy aged 16).

•

I ask why I can't have it — and if the reason is not good enough then I complain. If the reason is good enough I'll accept it. Otherwise I'll really complain about it and they'll accept my justification (Girl aged 16).

•

Stamp my feet. That usually gets me something, else usually ask a few questions and point out all the good points about it. Then go without it (Boy aged 15).

•

There were stronger reactions when we asked what children did when they wanted to *do* something but were not allowed to do it. Many children gave more than one response to this question. However, nearly half of the primary children (48 per cent) but fewer secondary children (41 per cent) said they would accept the refusal or do nothing. More secondary children (21 per cent) than primary (6 per cent) said they would take the positive action of discussing it with their parents. Nevertheless, it was secondary children (59 per cent) who were more likely than the primary (38 per cent) to react by arguing, getting in a temper, sulking or going ahead and doing it anyway. These actions may be seen by parents as negative or undesirable but at times may be necessary, particularly for teenagers as they try to establish their independence.

Get in a bad mood. Then Mum gets in a bad mood and we have an uproar (Boy aged 16).

•

Try to talk my mother into it and if I can't it's just too bad (Girl aged 16).

•

Get upset. I don't go and do it (Boy aged 15).

•

I don't do it. But sometimes I do and I'm a bit naughty (Girl aged 9).

•

Be sad. Just stay inside and watch TV or play with my car (Boy aged 9).

•

Kick me bike (Boy aged 8).

•

I try and get my own way, but when I can't I say, 'I'll be quiet if . . .' Sometimes they say yes, sometimes they say no (Girl aged 9).

•

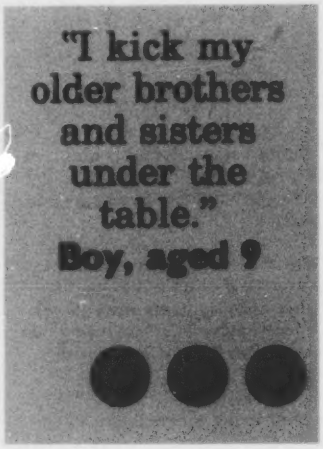
Sometimes I keep on harping about it and then Mum says, 'No, you can't!' She makes us go in our room for ten minutes or something. Well, then I just forget about it (Girl aged 9).

Conflict between brothers and sisters

FIGHTING AND SQUABBLING between brothers and sisters is a normal part of family life, although parents may wish it was not. We asked all children with brothers and sisters what sort of things started fights and arguments between them. The most common cause of squabbles at the **primary** school level was associated with sharing and taking turns at things (38 per cent).

When we use the same thing and my sister doesn't hurry up in the bathroom and I have to bang on the door and start punching her because she doesn't hurry up — she's in there for about an hour singing under the shower (Girl aged 9).

•



Using other people's things without asking (30 per cent), and teasing and provoking (24 per cent) were both common causes of fights.

Playing with each other's toys, or if we accidently hurt each other, or fights over TV shows (Girl aged 10).

•

I kick them [older siblings] under the table. I annoy them (Boy aged 9).

•

When my sister starts teasing me or else I start teasing her she gets angry with me or else she starts bossing me around all the time (Girl aged 9).

•

Younger children admitted to a great deal of physical reaction — kicking, punching, pinching and hitting — when fighting and arguing with their brothers and sisters. This may come as no surprise to many parents, but it may be comforting to know it is happening in many other families.

At **secondary** level teenagers are more concerned with privacy and independence, so using other people's possessions without asking (32 per cent) was the most common cause of arguments. Often the offending siblings entered the privacy of the teenagers' rooms and touched, damaged, or removed possessions.

My 3-year-old brother comes into my room and tears up a few books etc. I'm not allowed to shout at him because it's my fault that I leave books lying around! I tell him to get out (Girl aged 15).

•

Sharing and taking turns (26 per cent), teasing and provoking (23 per cent), choice of television programs (14 per cent) and bad moods (13 per cent) were all common causes of friction.

Just stupid little things like him trying to read something that I don't want him to read. Or me breaking something of his, or taking something I shouldn't have without asking him. Or trivial things like turns for washing the dishes (Girl aged 16).

•

Very trivial. More to do with if you're in the bathroom and you don't want someone to barge in. Or if you don't want things touched in your room (Girl aged 15).

•

Just anything. We never talk nicely to each other. We're always brawling (Boy aged 15).

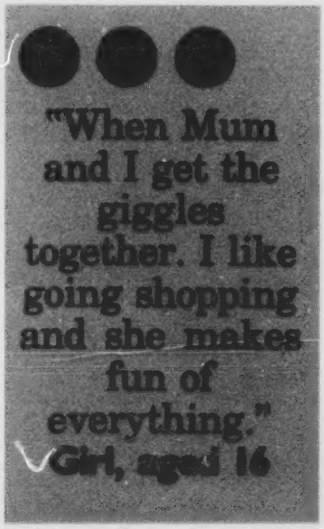
•

Lots of things — I really don't get on with my sister very well, not sure why. I don't think she likes me very much — anything starts an argument — everything I say seems to offend her (Girl aged 16).

When it feels good to be together as a family

IN ORDER TO GAIN SOME insight into the more positive aspects of family life, all children were asked if there were any times when it felt good to be together as a family. The most common reply at both levels was that sometimes it felt good (62 per cent primary, 56 per cent secondary). Some children clearly felt very positive about their families and said it always felt good to be together as a family, but this was more common for the younger children than the older ones (23 per cent primary, 16 per cent secondary). A few children said it felt good most of the time (8 per cent primary, 18 per cent secondary), while a very small number said it did not ever feel good together as a family (4 per cent primary, 9 per cent secondary).

Outings and barbecues and similar events were the most popular family times for primary school children (40 per cent primary, 27 per cent secondary), while for secondary school students the most popular events were holidays and birthdays (34 per cent secondary, 18 per cent primary). Some children gave a number of instances when it felt good to be together as a family.



Lots of times, every night and in the morning usually. When we're all together — birthdays. When we come home and everyone's at home. When we watch TV and we all have our own comments, it feels really good (Girl aged 9).

•

On Saturdays and Sundays when everyone has the day off and we're all together (Boy aged 10).

•

On holidays when we go places (Boy aged 9).

•

I like it on nights when it's cold and wet and windy outside and the whole family are in a warm room watching TV (Girl aged 16).

•

When Mum and I get the giggles together. I like going shopping and she makes fun of everything (Girl aged 16).

•

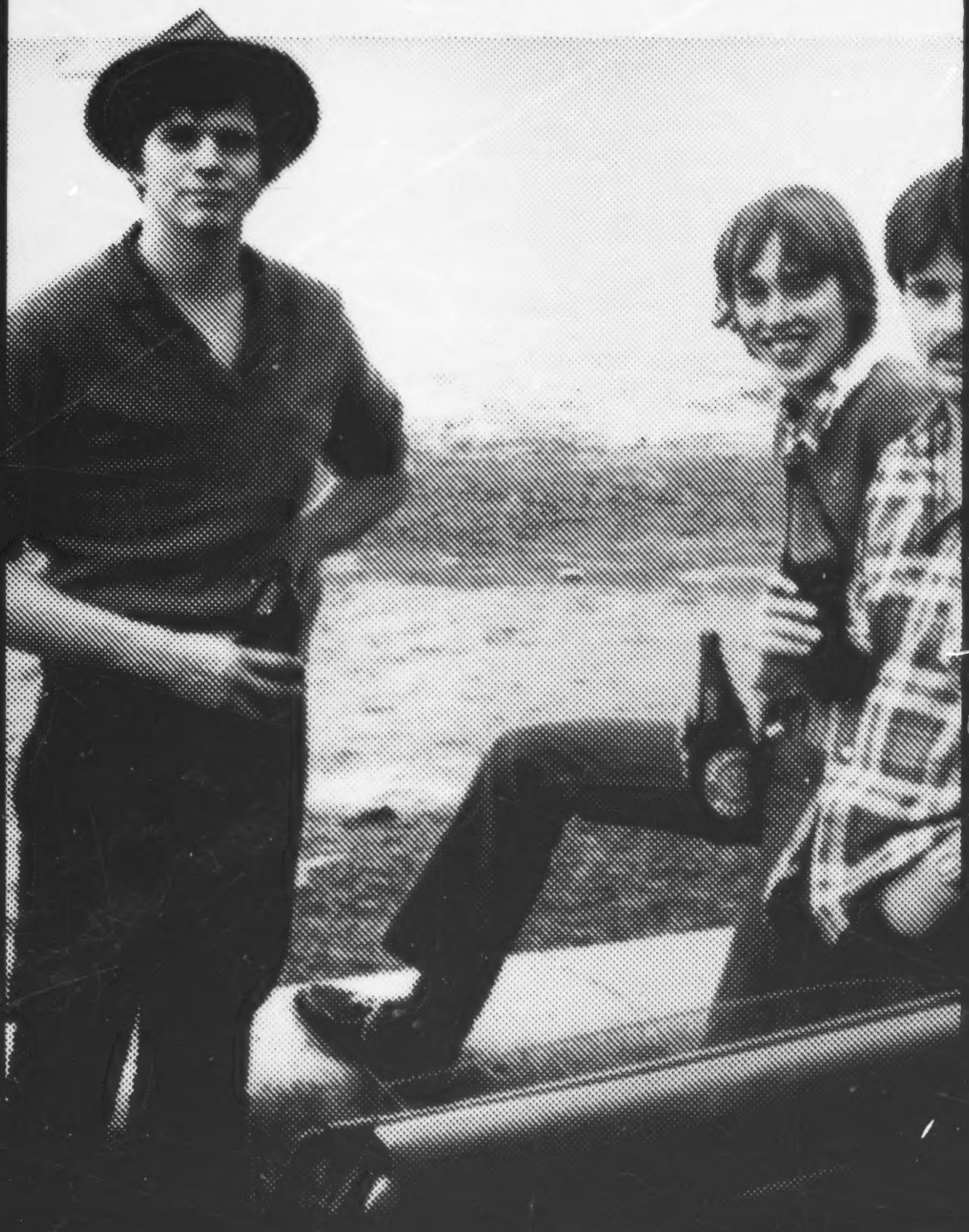
I like to have the family around when I've achieved something and it feels good when everyone's there and they've realised that you've done that, or when someone else has achieved something. That's when I like to have my family around (Boy aged 16).

•

Nevertheless, the few children who said it did not ever feel good to be together appeared to have good reasons for their feelings.

We hardly can be all together without an argument being brought up or without being picked on. I don't think we really have had a decent get-together without somebody arguing (Girl aged 16).

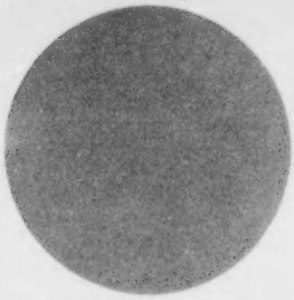
Children's friendshi



ps

FRIENDSHIP IS AN important aspect of child development from early childhood. Friends play a part in the child's moral development and sense of identity. In the give and take of developing a friendship young children come to understand one another and the world around them. Through peers, children learn both restraint and cooperation which is not imposed by adult authority (Youniss, 1980).

59



Teenage friendships are somewhat different from the friendships of younger children which focus on common activities. Because of adolescents' greater capacity for abstract thought and reflection, teenage friendships involve greater understanding and deeper feelings; conflict is more tolerated and friendships become more stable and long-lasting.

In adolescence the world becomes increasingly complex. School is no longer the well-known primary school with the one class teacher who knows each child thoroughly; secondary school is complex with many subject teachers and other activities. As the adolescent breaks away from dependence on parents, peers become more important, because peers are passing through similar experiences and share common anxieties and conflicts.

The friendship patterns of boys and girls are different. In early adolescence girls' friendships centre on activities but by middle adolescence the stress is on security, loyalty and trust. By late adolescence when heterosexual relationships may have developed, same-sex friendships are more relaxed with a greater appreciation of individuality. Girls have more anxiety and conflicts over friends than boys have and girls are less welcoming of newcomers. They stress intimacy, empathy and dependability. Boys' friendships centre on common pursuits and activities and disputes may occur about property, activities or girlfriends (Rutter, 1979; Coleman, 1980).

Some parents in this study were concerned that their children appeared to have no friends; others were worried because their children had too many and/or were too involved with them. The Institute of Family Studies questioned children about their friends to try to learn more about their patterns of friendship and how their friends got on with their families.

About two thirds of children at both levels (68 per cent primary, 65 per cent secondary) said they had one very best friend but even more had a few very good friends (97 per cent primary, 99 per cent secondary). Many children at both levels (87 per cent primary, 94 per cent secondary) said they were friendly with, but not close to, a number of people. Fewer children admitted to finding it hard to make friends, but more primary children expressed difficulty than did secondary children (51 per cent primary, 14 per cent secondary). Possibly this is because secondary students usually have more settled and established friendship patterns than primary children who still have much to learn about friendship. Also, secondary students may be hesitant about admitting to any difficulties.

Half the children at both levels usually liked to spend their spare time away from home (50 per cent primary, 50 per cent secondary). Some liked to spend time sometimes at home and sometimes away (8 per cent primary, 17 per cent secondary). The rest of the children preferred home to other places (42 per cent primary, 17 per cent secondary). That more primary children than secondary children preferred home is hardly unexpected as secondary students of 15 or 16 are concerned with establishing their own independent lives, and are hence less interested in remaining within the confines of home and family. The younger children are still very concerned with family and more dependent upon parents.

"My Dad doesn't like me going to one of my friend's place because he's got horror films that we watch and Dad doesn't think that's good."
Boy, aged 15

Friends parents do not like

WE WERE CONCERNED TO find out more about the vexing question of friends that parents do not like, and what happened as a result. Quite a large proportion of children at both levels (41 per cent primary, 59 per cent secondary) at some time have had a friend that their mothers did not like. Slightly fewer children

have had a friend their fathers did not like (31 per cent primary, 41 per cent secondary). This is possibly because mother is at home most often and is therefore more likely to meet her children's friends than are fathers. More primary children than secondary had to stop seeing the friend that their parents did not like (38 per cent primary, 19 per cent secondary). However, a surprisingly large number of children (61 per cent primary, 75 per cent secondary) continued to see their friends despite parental disapproval.

Primary children said the most common reason their parents gave for disapproval of friends was that they just did not like the child (26 per cent), or he/she was a 'bad influence' (14 per cent). Some parents gave no reason (11 per cent), others said the friend was 'not our type of person'. But a great variety of other more idiosyncratic reasons were also given. The following are some of the reasons for parental disapproval of friends as reported by the primary children.

Because he was too silly and always mucks around — he likes to fight (Boy aged 9).

•

Mum didn't give one reason (Girl aged 9).

•

Because they came from a different country (Girl aged 10).

•

He spits and swears (Boy aged 10).

•

Sometimes my parents don't like their mother and father, or they've seen the child and think it's disobedient (Girl aged 8).

•

They steal sometimes. 'Cause sometimes she steals my stuff and she says sorry she might have picked it up by accident (Girl aged 9).

•

According to **secondary** school children the most common reason parents gave for disapproval of friends was that they were a 'bad influence' (45 per cent). This was followed by parents 'just not liking the friend' (24 per cent). Others said the friend was 'not our type of person' (18 per cent). There were hardly any secondary students (2 per cent) who did not know the reason for their parents' disapproval of a friend. The following are some typical replies from secondary students.

She wasn't what Mum would call the type of person I should hang around with (Girl aged 16).

•

They seemed loud and rowdy themselves (Girl aged 15).

•

My Dad doesn't like me going to one of my friend's place because he's got horror films that we watch and Dad doesn't think that's good. He doesn't like me to see him any more (Boy aged 15).

•

My friend's attitude; the way she dressed; the way she hung around; her herself (Girl aged 16).

•

Quite a number of children at both age levels had friends who came over to their places often (37 per cent primary, 44 per cent secondary), and many had friends over sometimes (45 per cent primary, 42 per cent secondary). Only a few children 'hardly ever' had friends to their homes (18 per cent primary, 12 per cent secondary), and rarely did children say their friends never visited (1 per cent primary, 2 per cent secondary). On the whole, parents appeared to know most of their children's friends (58 per cent primary, 59 per cent secondary), and some (22 per cent primary, 15 per cent secondary) knew all of them. Some parents knew only a few of their children's friends (20 per cent primary, 27 per cent secondary) and a very small number knew none (0.5 per cent primary, 0.5 per cent secondary).

A common worry for parents, particularly those with younger children, is knowing where children are when they are away from home. Nevertheless, a large number of children reported that their parents always knew where they were (46 per cent primary, 45 per cent secondary), and a further large group said their parents mostly knew where they were (24 per cent primary, 38 per cent secondary). Fewer children said their parents only sometimes knew where they were (26 per cent primary, 14 per cent secondary), and a very small number of children said their parents usually did not know where they were (4 per cent primary, 3 per cent secondary).

Teenagers and trou

ble with the law

ONE OF THE GREAT FEARS of the parents of adolescents is that their children will get into some sort of trouble. Media publicity about adolescent drug-taking, drinking and vandalism can inflate these fears. The Institute of Family Studies asked the older students several questions in regard to these matters.

Of the 207 secondary school students, 51 per cent had friends who had been in some sort of trouble (which may include breaking the law). When examined in detail this usually meant rather minor difficulties. However, some children mentioned a number of more serious crimes but tossed off their replies in a very general and non-specific way.

They [friends] get into trouble but they don't really break the law. They just hang around (Boy aged 15).

•

A few boys said things like: *'People on drugs, alcohol, stealing'*, or *'Fighting, vandalism, drugs, burglaries'*, but gave no details to indicate they knew much about it. Others were more specific and hence more believable.

One of my friends got pinched for shoplifting (Girl aged 15).

•

Sometimes they do get into trouble — drinking (Boy aged 16).

•

About a quarter of these secondary students (24 per cent) said they themselves had been in some sort of trouble with the police. It must be pointed out that the definition of trouble is very broad and not all dealings with the police were because adolescents broke the law or committed crimes. Frequently the police were checking things out, preventing trouble before it occurred or inhibiting dangerous behaviour; only on a few occasions did police take action because the law had been broken. Shoplifting, drinking and fighting were the three major causes of real trouble with the police. The following are some of the replies given when we asked what actually happened in dealings with the police.

Not serious crime. As a kid, breaking bottles on a construction site and names were taken down. I was young then, but I took it fairly seriously (Boy aged 15).

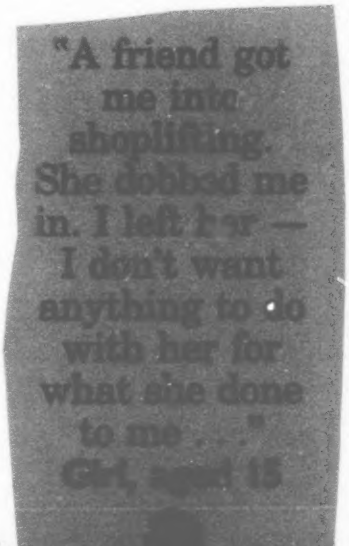
•

It was just that they got me name down. There was going to be a fight so the police came. Just got our names and told us to piss off. I haven't got a record (Boy aged 15).

•

Shoplifting. Was with a few mates and I was going to buy these pens and I didn't have enough money, so I thought I'd take them. Shopkeeper rang police. I went to the police station and made a statement. They rang Mum and Mum and Dad came down (Boy aged 15).

•



That was the time we were drinking in the City Square. We were taken to Russell Street and Dad had to come and pick me up (Boy aged 16).

•

Just trouble in the city when I walked across on a *Don't Walk* sign (Boy aged 16).

•

A friend got me into shoplifting. She dobbed me in. I left her — I don't want anything to do with her for what she done to me. She got me in really big trouble (Girl aged 15).

•

When I ran away from home. Police were looking for me and when I got home I had to answer a few questions (Girl aged 15).

•

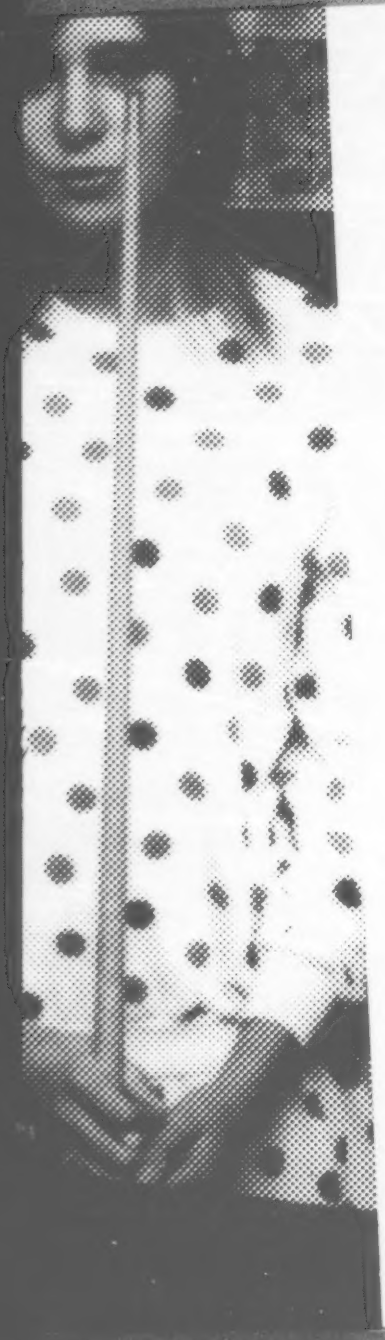
Only for riding a push bike without lights (Boy aged 16).

Drinking, smoking and drugs

WE ASKED THE adolescents if they smoked, drank or used marijuana. The largest proportion (61 per cent) said they did not smoke, 10 per cent said they hardly ever smoked, another 10 per cent said they sometimes smoked, and 20 per cent said they often smoked. Drinking alcohol appeared to be more common than smoking. Only 29 per cent said they never drank alcohol, 18 per cent said they hardly ever drank, 45 per cent said they sometimes did, and 8 per cent said they often did. Very few adolescents in this sample had used marijuana: 92 per cent said they had never used it, 5 per cent said hardly ever, 2 per cent said sometimes, and one adolescent claimed that he used it often.

Children's o

tside interests



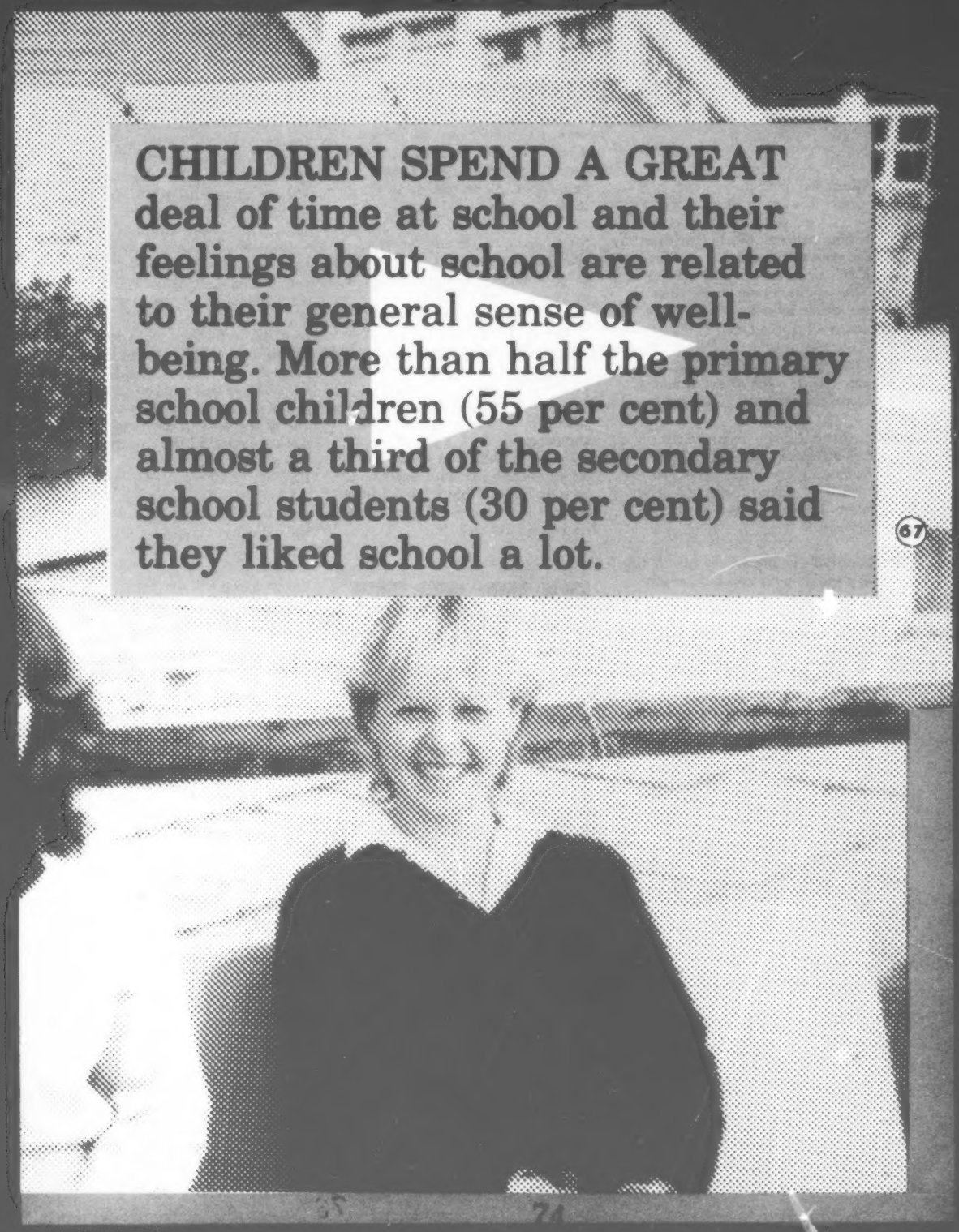
ABOUT TWO THIRDS OF ALL the children (64 per cent primary, 66 per cent secondary) belonged to a club or some organisation. The most commonly mentioned organisations at primary level were Cubs and Brownies (33 per cent); the older group equivalents — Guides, Scouts and Venturers were mentioned less frequently (10 per cent secondary). The most popular organisations for both age levels were various sorts of sporting clubs — netball and basketball (20 per cent primary, 22 per cent secondary), football and cricket (21 per cent primary, 22 per cent secondary), tennis and squash (8 per cent primary, 20 per cent secondary), calisthenics and gymnastics (7 per cent primary, 11 per cent secondary), little athletics (9 per cent primary, 3 per cent secondary); horse-riding, softball, baseball and swimming were also mentioned. Youth and church clubs were also popular with some children (7 per cent primary, 16 per cent secondary) and some children (7 per cent primary, 6 per cent secondary) were involved with choirs and orchestras.

About half the primary school children (51 per cent) spent between 1 and 2 hours a week at their organisations or clubs. Some attended between 3 and 4 hours (29 per cent), a further number (11 per cent) spent between 5 and 6 hours, and a few (6 per cent) between 7 and 8 hours. A very small number (3 per cent) spent more than a day each week. Overall, secondary children spent longer periods of time engaged with their club interests with only a few (14 per cent) attending for as little as 1 or 2 hours a week. The greatest number (30 per cent) attended for between 3 and 4 hours, quite a few (20 per cent) between 5 and 6 hours, and some (13 per cent) between 7 and 8 hours. A number of children (24 per cent) spent over a day altogether each week engaged in activities with their clubs. However it must be remembered that about a third of the children at both levels of schooling did not belong to any organisation or club.

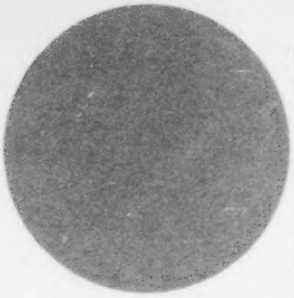
Sixty-three primary children and 56 secondary were having some sort of special lessons. In order of popularity for primary school children were music (43 per cent), sport (30 per cent), dancing (18 per cent), ethnic school (5 per cent), horse-riding (3 per cent) and coaching in school subjects (2 per cent). Another group of children (16 per cent) mentioned all sorts of special lessons which did not make up any particular categories. At secondary level the order of popularity was — sport (41 per cent), dancing (9 per cent), horse-riding (5 per cent). A further group (13 per cent) mentioned a variety of special lessons which did not fall into any categories. A further 25 children at both levels had attended special lessons at some stage but had not continued with them.

Children's views on

school



CHILDREN SPEND A GREAT deal of time at school and their feelings about school are related to their general sense of well-being. More than half the primary school children (55 per cent) and almost a third of the secondary school students (30 per cent) said they liked school a lot.



Good. I like school. I need it. It's where I want to be (Girl aged 15).

•

I think this school's better than my old school. I like doing maths. I didn't before — but now I like it. The teachers help more than at the other school — take more notice of us (Girl aged 9).

•

I like it — mostly my class. I get along with most of them and some classes I like (Girl aged 16).

•

Quite a large group of children at both primary level (32 per cent) and secondary level (40 per cent) had mixed feelings — they liked school a little but not always.

It doesn't really worry me. It fills in time. It gets you a good job (Boy aged 16).

•

It's something I have to do. The medium to get somewhere. If there was a way around it, I'd get around it (Boy aged 15).

•

I see it as something that I *have* to do — obligation to parents. But something that I *want* to do, too, because I want to succeed. That's why I came back to school but I wish this school was a bit better (Girl aged 17).

•

At primary level a few children said they did not like school much (8 per cent) or they hated it (5 per cent). There were more secondary school students (24 per cent) who did not like school much and a few who hated it (6 per cent).

I hate it — because I like staying home and reading the newspaper (Boy aged 9).

•

I hate it, I only go because I have to go (Girl aged 16).

•

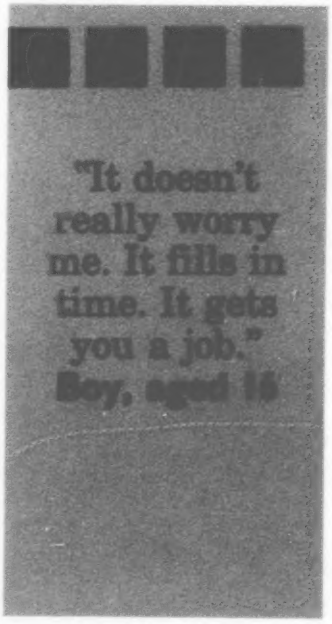
I'm getting a bit sick of it. That's why I'm leaving. But then I realise that after I do leave, I'll miss it. School just seems to be a part of me. I've been going so many years. I've got to get rid of it sooner or later (Girl aged 15).

•

It's starting to get me down a lot. It's become a drag. I know I have to go and learn for exams but it's just become so tedious. Sometimes I just lie in my bed and wish that I could be about 25 and every bit of education was out of the way and you could live your life (Boy aged 15).

•

Terrible — I hate getting up in the morning. I hate doing school work — it puts a lot of pressure on you especially with exams coming up and that's what I hate most. I just hate getting up in the morning (Girl aged 15).

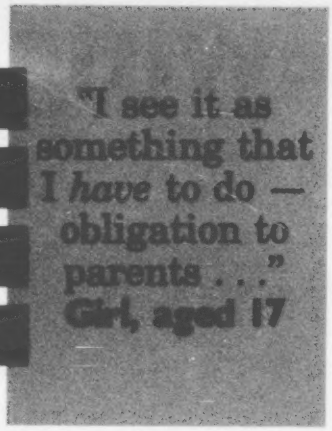


Position in the class

MOST PRIMARY SCHOOL children thought they had good positions in the class — many (33 per cent) thought they were in about the middle of their class; quite a number felt they were above the middle of the class (23 per cent) or one of the best (23 per cent). Only a few thought they were below the middle (9 per cent) or near the bottom (7 per cent). This contrasts with the adolescents at **secondary** school where more than half (51 per cent) thought they were about in the middle of the class and a further 30 per cent thought they were above the middle; not many (10 per cent) thought they were one of the best in the class. A few adolescents said they were below the middle (6 per cent) or near the bottom (3 per cent).

Less than half (43 per cent) of primary school children wished their mothers could help them more with school work or other aspects of their lives. The rest of the children (57 per cent) were satisfied and wanted no more help from their mothers. Less than a third (30 per cent) of secondary students wished their mothers could help them more. Less than half (46 per cent) of the primary children wished their fathers could help them more, and about a third of secondary students (33 per cent) felt the same.

More than half the mothers of the primary school children (52 per cent) went to the school for parent-teacher days or other school functions. In many families (35 per cent) both parents went. Father went alone very rarely (3 per cent) and in some families (9 per cent) no-one went. At secondary school level more parents (44 per cent) went together to parent-teacher meetings or other school functions. Quite a large group of mothers (38 per cent) went alone,



very few fathers (4 per cent) went alone, and in some families (12 per cent) neither parent went to parent-teacher meetings or other school functions.

Best and worst subjects

TO GET SOME FURTHER IDEA about children's feelings about school we asked what their best and worst subjects were. At **primary** school maths was most often said by children to be their best subject (63 per cent), but more boys (72 per cent) than girls (55 per cent) said maths. Next came reading, (39 per cent), but more girls (45 per cent) than boys (32 per cent) said this was their best subject. Creative writing (26 per cent) and spelling (26 per cent) came next as the subjects children were best at, followed by art, craft and music (14 per cent). Other subjects were less frequently cited as best subjects. Interestingly enough, maths was also most often said by children to be their worst subject (34 per cent), but more girls (47 per cent) than boys (20 per cent) said maths. It appears maths is a subject which is either good or bad, loved or hated! Next came creative writing (19 per cent), but more boys (21 per cent) than girls (11 per cent) thought this was their worst subject. Spelling (16 per cent) came next as the subject children were worst at, followed by reading (14 per cent) and art, craft and music (10 per cent). Other subjects were also indicated but in small numbers.

Secondary school students also most often mentioned maths as being their best subject, but the percentage was lower (42 per cent). Once again, more boys (53 per cent) than girls (33 per cent) considered maths their best subject. English was also frequently felt to be the subject these students were best at (41 per cent). But for girls (47 per cent) English was most often the best subject, while for boys it was a little less popular (34 per cent). Humanities (34 per cent) was also often mentioned as a best subject, followed by science (28 per cent). However, science was more popular as a best subject with boys (33 per cent) than with girls (24 per cent). Art, craft and sewing (18 per cent) and commercial subjects (18 per cent) were also seen as best subjects by some students.

As with the primary children, more secondary students (40 per cent) felt maths was their worst subject. Humanities (32 per cent) was also frequently mentioned as the worst subject, followed by science (29 per cent) and English (24 per cent). Other subjects were less frequently mentioned.

After school activities

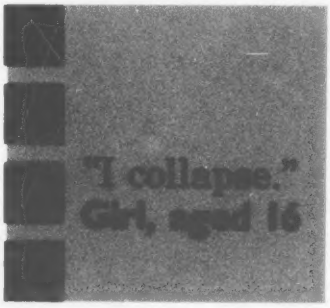
WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY usually did straight after school, most children at both levels said they went home (87 per cent primary, 87 per cent secondary). However, after coming home they then engaged in various activities such as watching television, playing, doing homework, and so on.

I usually just come in and put my stuff in the bedroom and tell Mum about my day (Girl aged 16).

I have something to eat; then I usually sit down; then I go to my friend's house (Boy aged 9).

I go home, watch TV, or other nights play sport (Boy aged 16).

Some primary children (18 per cent) and some secondary (11 per cent) said they went to a friend's place. A few primary children (4 per cent) and more secondary children (10 per cent) played some sort of sport. Very few primary children (2 per cent) and not many secondary (6 per cent) hung around shops or wandered the streets. In the majority of homes (79 per cent primary, 64 per cent secondary) mother was at home when the child came in from



school. In many families (17 per cent primary, 32 per cent secondary, if mother was not there brothers or sisters were likely to be. Father was there in a few families (12 per cent primary, 8 per cent secondary). Fewer primary school children (9 per cent) went home to no one than did secondary students (21 per cent), as might be expected: secondary school students were more likely to be thought capable of caring for themselves after school than were primary school children; also, it is likely that mothers of these older children may have been working.

Television viewing habits

MOST OF THE CHILDREN AT both age levels watched *some* television after tea during the week (63 per cent primary, 80 per cent secondary). More primary school children (33 per cent) than secondary students (13 per cent) watched television after tea until bedtime. This difference may in part be because younger children usually go to bed earlier than the older children. A small number of children at both levels watched no television after tea (4 per cent primary, 8 per cent secondary). More primary children (54 per cent), than secondary (15 per cent) watched television before school. Secondary students (29 per cent) were more likely to talk to their parents often about what they watched on television than were primary children (16 per cent). Quite a large group at both levels said they talked to their parents sometimes about what they watched (28 per cent primary, 24 per cent secondary). However, a large number of children at both levels said they hardly ever (36 per cent primary, 34 per cent secondary) or never (26 per cent primary, 12 per cent secondary) talked to their parents about what they watched on television.

Children's job expectations

WE ASKED EACH CHILD AT both age levels what job he or she would *like* to have when he or she left school. The most popular jobs for both primary and secondary students were those in the professional or technical category (44 per cent primary, 51 per cent secondary). For **primary** children, the next most popular jobs were those to do with service, sport or recreation (20 per cent), trades and labour (11 per cent), selling (6 per cent) and transport and

71

communication (5 per cent). For **secondary** students the order of choice was different — jobs to do with trades and labour (13 per cent), followed by service, sport and recreation (10 per cent), then clerical (8 per cent). Farming (including fishing and timber) was steady at both levels (4 per cent for both primary and secondary) as was the armed services (4 per cent for both primary and secondary). Many other categories were also mentioned by small numbers of children.

We followed this question by asking each child what job he or she *expected* to have when he or she left school. This question was designed to be more realistic than the previous question. At both age levels a large percentage of children did not know what jobs they expected to get (54 per cent primary, 41 per cent secondary). This is reasonable as it is difficult for children, particularly young children, to know what their capacities are and what jobs are available. Young children also often change their minds.

The problems of secondary students were rather different; they were more aware of their own skills, limitations, and interests, and even more importantly in the current employment market, many were aware of the problems of youth unemployment and of getting any job — of the 207 secondary students in the sample 61 per cent said they feared unemployment when they left school.

Conclusion

THIS REPORT, **THE CHILD'S eye view of family life**, contains a brief descriptive overview of the *Australian Children in Families Study* which looked at family life from the child's perspective. Other more analytical reports and papers are also being prepared and will be published later by the Institute of Family Studies. These reports will contain information and tables from the three tests done by the children — a reading test, a self-esteem scale, and an everyday skills test: scores from these scales have been broken down by family type. The further reports and papers will be available from the Institute of Family Studies.

As was pointed out in the introduction to this report, Australian families are now more diverse than formerly and have altered in many ways. However, it is also clear that in other ways family life has not changed a great deal; children still depend on and respect their parents although children may have a more free and easy approach to them. Nevertheless, children of this generation are facing some special problems. With the increase in divorce, the fears of many children that their parents may separate are realistic. The Institute of Family Studies estimates that 40 per cent of all marriages will end in divorce. This estimate is the same for both remarriages and first marriages. Sixty per cent of divorces involve dependent children (McDonald, 1983). Increasing numbers of marriages are breaking down in the first ten years which means that children are likely to be young (Institute of Family Studies Annual Report 1982-83). The percentage of children living in a one-parent household at some stage in their lives is increasing, and if the children who lose a parent through death are included also, the percentage will be even higher. However exact figures are unavailable at present. In the United States it is estimated that between 45 and 50 per cent of children will at some time live in a one-parent family because of divorce or death of a parent (Bane, 1979).

There is one major problem for children living in one-parent families which has not been mentioned previously in this report, and that is poverty. The Supporting Parent Benefit does not provide an adequate standard of living, particularly for families who are paying high rents for housing. In the 1970s, the *Commission of Inquiry into Poverty* (1975) indicated that one in every three one-parent families was below the poverty line and that lone-mothers had the lowest incomes of all. More recent work at the Institute of Family Studies indicates that incomes of more than half of one-parent families now fall below the poverty line (Burbidge, 1984). One-parent families are more likely than two-parent families to be living in private or State rental accommodation. Female-headed one-parent families are more likely than male-headed one-parent families to be renting accommodation. One-parent families are more likely to live in crowded conditions with fewer of the basic household appliances and, if in the workforce, mothers in one-parent homes are more likely than mothers in two-parent homes to be working full-time (English, King and Smith, 1978).

Economic problems can have a substantial impact on family life, and other research being conducted by the Institute of Family Studies is examining this issue in detail.

We hope this report, **The Child's Eye View of Family Life**, has enabled parents to understand something about the perspectives of their own and other children; we hope it has enabled children to find out more about how other children feel about their families. We also hope that both children and parents have learned a little more about families which are different from their own.

List of References

AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics (1982), *Australian families*, Catalogue No. 4407.0.

AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics (1981,1983), *Divorces Australia*, Catalogue No. 3307.0.

AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics (1984), *Estimated resident population by sex and age: States and Territories of Australia, June 1983*, Catalogue No. 3201.0.

BANE, Mary Jo (1979), 'Marital disruption and the lives of children', in Levinger G. and Moles, O.C. eds, *Divorce and separation: context, causes and consequences*, Basic Books, New York.

BELL, R.Q. (1979), 'Parent, child, and reciprocal influences', in *American Psychologist*, Vol. 34, pp. 821-826.

BEST, Geoffrey (1973), *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875*, Panther, St Albans.

BOOCOCK, Sarane Spence (1975), 'The social context of childhood', in *Proceedings of the American philosophical society*, Vol. 119, No. 6, pp. 420-428.

BRENNAN, Deborah (1983), *Towards a national child care policy*, Policy Background Paper No. 2, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

BUMPASS, Larry and RINDFUSS, R. (1978), 'Children's experience of marital disruption', Institute for Research on Poverty, Discussion Paper No. 5, University of Wisconsin.

BURBIDGE, Andrew (1984), *Poverty in Australia: new data on the incomes of Australian families and individuals*, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

CLEVERLY, J. and PHILLIPS, D.C. (1976), *From Locke to Spock: influential models of the child in modern western thought*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

COLEMAN, John C. (1980), *The nature of adolescence*, Methuen, London.

COLLINS, Randall (1975), *Conflict sociology*, Academic Press, New York.

COMMISSION of Inquiry into Poverty (1975), (First main report, Professor R.F. Henderson, Chairman), *Poverty in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra.

DUNLOP, R. and BURNS, A. (1983), 'Adolescents and divorce: the experience of family break-up', in Australian Family Research Conference *Proceedings*, Vol. II, Family Law, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

EDGAR, D.E. (1980), *Introduction to Australian society*, Prentice-Hall, Sydney.

ELLISON, E.S. (1983), 'Issues concerning parental harmony and children's psychosocial adjustment', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 73-80.

ENGLISH, B.A., KING, R.J. and SMITH, S.S. (1978), *Families in Australia — a profile*, Family Research Unit, University of New South Wales.

GOODMAN, Mary Ellen (1973), *The culture of childhood: child's eye views of society and culture*, Teacher's College Press, Columbia.

HARTUP, William W. (1978), 'Perspectives on child and family interaction: past, present, and future', in Lerner, R.L. and Spanier, G.B. eds, *Child influences on marital and family interaction*, Academic Press, New York.

HESS, Robert D. (1981), 'Approaches to the measurement and interpretation of parent-child interaction', in Henderson, Ronald W. ed., *Parent-child interaction*, Academic Press, New York.

HESS, Robert D. and CAMARA, Kathleen A. (1979), 'Post-divorce family relationships as mediating factors in the consequences of divorce for children', *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 79-95.

INSTITUTE of Family Studies (1983a), *Annual Report 1982-83*, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

INSTITUTE of Family Studies (1983b), *Australian families with dependent children*, Fact Sheet, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

INSTITUTE of Family Studies (1983c), *Married Women: Labour force status and child dependents 1974-81 (1)*, Fact Sheet, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

INSTITUTE of Family Studies (1983d), *Early childhood services*, Submission to the Victorian Government Review of Early Childhood Services, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

KAGAN, J. (1977), 'The child and the family', *Daedalus*, Spring, pp. 33-56.

KURDEK, Lawrence A. and SEISKY, Albert E. (1980), 'Children's perceptions of their parents' divorce', *Journal of Divorce*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 339-378.

KURDEK, L.A., BLISK, D. and SEISKY, A.E. (1981), 'Correlates of children's long-term adjustment to their parents divorce', *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 5, pp. 565-579.

LAMB, M.E. (1976), *The role of the father in child development*, Wiley, New York.

LEVITIN, Teresa E. (1979), 'Children of divorce: an introduction', *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 35, No. 4.

LONGFELLOW, Cynthia (1979), 'Divorce in context: its impact on the children', in Levinger, G. and Moles, O.C. eds, *Divorce and separation*, Basic Books, New York.

McDONALD, Peter (1983), *Can the family survive?* Discussion Paper No. 11, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

OCHILTREE, Gay and AMATO, Paul (1983), 'Family conflict and child competence', in Australian Family Research Conference Proceedings, Vol. VI, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

OCHILTREE, G. and EDGAR, D.E. (1980), *The changing face of childhood*, Discussion Paper No. 4, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

POSTER, Mark (1978), *Critical theory of the family*, Pluto Press, New York.

PUGH, Gillian (1983), 'Parent education in action', Paper given at OECD:CERI Seminar on The Educational Role of the Family held in Japan [unpublished].

RASCHKE, H.J. and RASCHKE, V.J. (1979), 'Family conflict and children's self-concepts: a comparison of intact and single-parent families', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 367-385.

RUTTER, Michael (1971), 'Parent-child separation: psychological effects on the children', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 12, pp. 233-260.

RUTTER, Michael (1979), 'Maternal deprivation, 1972-1978: new findings, new concepts, new approaches', *Child Development*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 283-305.

SKOLNICK, A. (1978), 'The myth of the vulnerable child', *Psychology Today*, February, pp. 56-58.

STORER, Des (1981), *Migrant families in Australia*, Working Paper No. 3, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

WALLERSTEIN, Judith S. and KELLY, Judith B. (1980), *Surviving the breakup: how children and parents cope with divorce*, Grant McIntyre, London.

WEISS, Robert S. (1979), *Going it alone: the family life and social situation of the single parent*, Basic Books, New York.

WEISS, Robert S. (1981), 'Growing up a little faster: children in single parent households', *Children Today*, May-June, pp. 22-25.

WHITE, Lynn K. and BRINKERHOFF, David B. (1981), 'Children's work in the family: its significance and meaning', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 789-798.

YARROW, Leon J. (1960), 'Interviewing children', in Mussen, Paul W. ed., Chapter 14, *Handbook of research methods in child development*, John Wiley, New York.

YOUNISS, James (1980), *Parents and peers in social development*, University of Chicago.

INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES — ORIGINAL DATA COLLECTION

The Institute of Family Studies, established under the provisions of the *Family Law Act 1975*, began operation in 1980 with the aim of developing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of factors affecting family structure and family life in Australia. The policy advisory approach of the Institute stresses the importance of the economic status and well-being of Australian families and positive programs of support for families and the needs of children.

An important part of the Institute's work to date involves four original data collection projects. Data collected from individual surveys from each of these projects will be analysed and reported on by the Institute. Subsequently, data from selected surveys will also be released for analysis by other researchers.

To date, the four original data collection projects are:

- the **Australian Family Formation Study (AFF Study)**, aimed at discovering how young Australians feel about getting married and having children and what factors influence their decisions for the future;
- the **Australian Marriage Breakdown Study (AMB Study)**, designed to examine the reasons why marriages dissolve, how people cope, the legal process of divorce and its economic and social consequences, remarriage and step-parenting;
- the **Australian Children in Families Study (ACIF Study)**, designed to explore how young children and adolescents living with both natural parents, with one parent or in re-formed families view family life, and their active use of family resources in the development of competence;
- the **Family Support in Australia Study (FASA Study)**, aimed at examining the types of support that families offer to their members as well as the types of formal support services they use, and in what circumstances these kinds of support and services are sought.

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN IN FAMILIES STUDY

Aims of the Study

The Australian Institute of Family Studies holds that the views and experiences of children should be given equal importance to those of adults, particularly as few overseas or Australian studies have looked at the child's view of family life. Accordingly, the Australian Children in Families Study (ACIF Study) was designed to examine children's views of family life in a variety of ordinary Australian families including intact, step and one-parent family types. Such families range across the economic and educational spectrum, from the contented to the unhappy, from the organised to the chaotic.

The ACIF Study focuses on how the child uses the family as a resource, as a base from which to control the environment. The theme of competence is central. Different families offer varied environments in which to grow as independent, coping human beings: health, finances, emotional support, cultural values, decision-making processes, educational support, all contribute to the sorts of adults and parents today's children will become.

In particular, the ACIF Study looks at:

- children's relationships with their parents
- how children feel when their parents separate or divorce
- children's feelings about their access parents
- children's relationships within the family
- sources of family conflict and family cohesion.

By giving a comprehensive picture of what children think about family life, the ACIF Study complements other research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies into factors affecting the marital and family stability of Australian families. The study will provide a better understanding of the influence of family type on the child's perceptions and on the development of his or her social and intellectual competence.

Description of the Study Surveys

ACIF Study — 1982-83 IFS Survey

Members of the survey team: Paul Amato, Don Edgar, Sue Girling-Butcher, Pam Larritt, Gay Ochiltree (Principal Researcher), Irving Saulwick (consultant), Malcolm Rosier (consultant — sampling procedures).

The 1982-83 IFS Survey consisted of the organising, conducting and analysing of in-depth interviews with 402 Victorian school children aged 8 to 9 years and 15 to 16 years and, separately, one parent of each child. After extensive planning and pilot-testing by the Institute's ACIF Study team, the survey went into the field in September 1982.

All the families interviewed were selected through Victorian schools. Altogether, 56 primary and 57 secondary schools were able to participate in the survey. These were selected randomly, but in a manner which ensured that they represented, in the correct proportions, all State and private school systems in Victoria.

In selecting the children for the survey, one Year 3 or Year 4 class was selected from each primary school and one Year 10 or Year 11 class from each secondary school. In each of these classes, a special effort was made to recruit students from one-parent families or step-parent families. This was because one of the main reasons for the ACIF Study was to find out about the experiences of children growing up in a *variety* of family types. Children were randomly selected from each family type to obtain equal numbers from intact and non-intact households. Letters were sent home with each child selected explaining the reasons for the survey and asking permission for the interview. Of the families contacted, 402 (approximately 40 per cent) were willing to participate in the survey.

Interviews were completed with 195 primary school children and 207 secondary school children and one parent from each of these families. Both age groups were nearly evenly divided between boys and girls. Of all the children, 50 per cent lived with both natural parents, 31 per cent lived with one parent only (28 per cent with mothers and 3 per cent with fathers), 18 per cent lived in step-parent families, and 1 per cent lived with relatives other than parents.

About 61 per cent of the families were living in the Melbourne area, with 39 per cent living throughout the rest of the State. Most parent interviews were conducted with mothers (90 per cent) although fathers (7.5 per cent) and step-parents or other relatives (2.5 per cent) were occasionally interviewed instead.

The occupations of family members covered the entire spectrum of occupational groups.

For each family studied, one interview was conducted with the child and one with either the child's mother or father. The two interviews were needed, since the child's understanding and experience of family life is likely to be different in many ways from that of his or her parents. Talking to both parents and children allowed the researchers to piece together a more complete picture of family life than would have been possible if only children *or* parents had been interviewed.

The interviews with children covered a number of different aspects of family life including: the child's relationship with his or her mother and father; the kinds of jobs that child did around the house; whether the child received an allowance (and if so, how much); the kinds of activities the family engaged in together; the kinds of rules that existed in the family; and sources of conflict and tension among family members. Additional questions were asked of those children whose parents had separated or divorced, including questions dealing with their feelings at the time of separation.

To enable the interview to run smoothly, care was taken to use the language of children rather than formal, grammatically correct language which was unnatural to them. Care was also taken to word the questions in language suitable for both primary and secondary school groups chosen for the study.

The interviews with parents also covered a range of topics including: their views of the child's personality and behaviour; their relationship with the child; their aspirations and expectations of the child; problems they had encountered in raising the child; their values regarding children; and their marital relationship. As in the children's interviews, additional questions were asked of parents who had divorced or separated, including how they thought the separation had affected their children.

Many of the questions asked were open-ended — that is, children and parents were encouraged to respond to the questions in any way they liked, and all their comments were written down by the interviewers. This was in order to encourage respondents to tell their stories as much as possible in their own words.

ACIF Study — 1986 IFS Survey
Follow-up interviews with the young people in the 1982-83 IFS Survey are planned for 1986. By this date, the adolescents in the original sample will be 19 to 20 years. This survey will examine the situation of youth in regard to work, unemployment and further education, and the role the family has in important life decisions. Younger children in the original 1982-83 sample will be 12 to 13 years and will have made the transition from primary to secondary school. The 1986 survey will examine how the family contributes to the development of competence over an extended period of time.

Contracted Research

In addition to research conducted by staff of the Institute of Family Studies, three surveys on specific topics have been contracted to researchers external to the Institute.

ACIF Study — 1982 Dunlop Survey
In this survey the researchers, Rosemary Dunlop and Ailsa Burns, examine the adjustment of adolescents whose parents had divorced recently.

ACIF Study — 1985 Dunlop Survey
This is a follow-up to the 1982 survey by the same researchers, Rosemary Dunlop and Ailsa Burns.

ACIF Study — 1982-83 Smiley Survey
Conducted by Geoff Smiley, Edna Chamberlain and Len Dalgleish, this survey examines the effects of divorce on the social circumstances of young children.

Australian Children in Family Study Publications

To date, publications based on ACIF Study data include:

'Family conflict and child competence', by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato, in *Proceedings Volume VI, Family Life*, Australian Family Research Conference, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984. (Price: $8, or $50 full set 7 vols)

'Adolescents and divorce: the experience of family break-up', by Rosemary Dunlop and Ailsa Burns, in *Proceedings Volume II, Family Law*, Australian Family Research Conference, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984. (Price: $8, or $50 full set 7 vols)

'Some social, economic and relationship effects following marital separation', by Geoff Smiley, Edna Chamberlain and Len Dalgleish, in *Proceedings Voume II, Family Law*, Australian Family Research Conference, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984. (Price $8, or $50 full set 7 vols)

The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale: an evaluation of its use on an Australian population, by Paul Amato, Working Paper No. 6, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne,1984. (Price: $1)

'The child's use of family resources', by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato, in *Social change and family policies, Key Papers Part 1*, XXth International CFR Seminar, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984. (Price: $12, or $50 full set of 5 vols)

'Adolescence and the family', by Gay Ochiltree, in *IFS Newsletter*, No. 10, August 1984, pp.12-18, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984 (Gratis)

'The effects of family conflict on the competence of children', by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato, in *The Educational Magazine*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1984, pp.6-8. (Available from Education Department of Victoria)

The child's eye view of family life: a report to respondents in a study conducted in Victoria in late 1982 and early 1983, by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1985. (Price: $10)

The child's eye view of family life: a report prepared for the younger children in a study conducted in Victoria in late 1982 and early 1983, by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1985. (Only for respondents)

Further publications based on ACIF Study data are being prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Institute of Family Studies
766 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne 3000 Australia
Telephone (03) 342 9100